Philia

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Philia

by Gweezle

Summary

Getting into Jack Crawford's Forensic Psychology class was a dream come true for Will Graham, until he learns that his final assignment is to attend twelve interviews with the notorious serial killer, Hannibal the Cannibal, in order to unravel his mysterious past.

Even as he grows closer to the truth, he also grows closer to Dr. Lecter, and the doctor is very eager to get to know this young man who thinks like a murderer.

Notes

Greetings, my doves. Long-time lurker. First-time poster. (Well, I've posted some things on Fanfiction(dot)net, but that was years ago.) Hopefully this story is enjoyable. I've been working on it for months. Just need a few more weeks to edit and format the rest of the chapters. I'll try to post a new one every 2-3 days, which you'll soon be grateful for. A previous reviewer once called me the Queen of Cliffhangers.

Please forgive my artistic liberties when it comes to American university. I'm Canadian, and used a Canadian school as a template for Will's education. (My Canadianess also comes through in my spelling. You'll see a lot of extra u's in words that don't necessarily need them. My spell-check is set to Canadian English, and honestly, some words just look prettier with the extra letters. Also, you get more points while playing Scrabble.) Since the focus is more on Will's relationship with Hannibal, I didn't think it mattered enough to do all the extra research. (Although I have done a ridiculous amount of research. My search history probably put me on some sort of watch list.)

Now, I've prattled on long enough. Enjoy!

See the end of the work for more notes

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: Philia（友爱） by ElisaDay
- Translation into Русский available: Philia by puzikowatsona

Final Assignment

Monday, January 11th – Friday, January 15th, 2016

Will checks his watch once more, cursing himself for not keeping a better eye on the time this morning. A beagle/boxer mix – tiny and white with brown patches of fur – sits patiently in the backseat of his old mustang. He'd found the poor thing digging through the garbage that morning, and spent nearly half an hour coaxing the little dog into his car.

"We're almost to the shelter, buddy. Then I've gotta go. Professor Crawford will be furious if I show up late to class on the first day."

The dog lets out a quiet whine, and then lays down, resting his head on his paws. Will turns around as he stops at a red light. "Tell me about it. Starting class at 8:00 a.m. on a Monday should be illegal."

Another soft whine erupts from the backseat.

"Yeah, I know, but Peter will look after you. He'll adopt you himself if he can't find you a good home."

The dog doesn't answer, so he turns back to face the road, waiting impatiently for the light to change.

They finally reach the animal shelter, and he breathes out a sigh of relief. If he hurries, he might just make it to class on time.

Unfortunately, the little dog is reluctant to leave his car, so Will is forced to carry it inside.

He recognizes the woman inside, her dark skin contrasting with the white walls of the front office. "Hey, Reba. It's Will," he says, setting the dog down on the floor. It cowers next to him, whimpering as he reaches out to pet him. "It's okay, boy. Good dog."

"Hey, Will," Reba says, turning her head in his direction. Her eyes don't quite meet his, which is one of the reasons he finds it so easy to talk to her.

"Did you find another one?" she asks, almost crossly.

"Uh…yeah. He showed up outside this morning," he explains, indicating to the dog.

"Come on, boy. Reba's nice. Francis is nice too," Will says, reaching a hand out for Reba's service dog, a golden retriever, to sniff. One side of the dog's mouth is curved up in a permanent sneer, exposing a few teeth. Some might say it makes him look ugly, but since the person he's around most is blind, it's never seemed to matter much. Reba's always more concerned that he can eat properly than if he looks good. He's likely here for another checkup to make sure his exposed teeth are still healthy. Dry mouth can reap havoc on enamel.

Will retracts his hand, noticing the dog's vest – an indication that he's still in work-mode. "Sorry, do you mind if I pet Francis?"

Reba nods. "Francis, downtime!" she commands, and instantly his tongue lolls out and he falls down to bare his stomach, panting happily. "Go ahead."

Will scratches the bigger dog behind his ears, and rubs his belly, then holds his hand under the stray's nose. "See, boy? Frankie's a good dog."

The little dog sniffs his hand hesitantly, giving Francis a suspicious look, but settles down a bit.

At that moment, Peter Bernardone – one of the caretakers at the shelter – steps into the front room. "Dr. Kimura can take him now, Reba. Oh – oh, hi again, Will."

"Hey, Peter," Will greets. "I found another stray. Figured I'd drop him off on the way to school."

Peter looks at the dog, squinting a bit. "I'll – I'll make sure he's looked at."

Peter's employee pass comes loose, falling to the floor.

Will picks it up, "Hey, you dropped your pass, Peter."

Reba pauses, tilting her head. "Did it come loose again? Maybe you should try a safety pin."

Peter reaches out slowly, hand shaking. "Th-thanks, Will. Maybe a safety pin – I could try that." He takes Francis's leash with a soft, "Up, boy!" and leads him to the back room to be looked over by the veterinarian. Then he comes back, holding a dog treat out that makes the little beagle/boxer come running. "Good boy." He picks the dog up carefully a waves to Will. "I'll feed him while he waits. N-nice seeing you, Will."

Will smiles as Peter walks into the back room again. "Nice seeing you too, Peter." He then glances up at the clock and feels panic set in. "Oh, shit! I've gotta go. See you later, Reba." He darts out of the shelter and starts his car, cursing himself for losing track of time again.

2

He's nearly fifteen minutes late, and cringes when he hears Crawford lecturing through the closed door of his classroom.

He goes inside, and Crawford looks at him, pausing. He leans heavily against his cane, gripping it just a bit tighter when he sees who is at the door.

Will blushes, ducking his head. "Sorry, I'm late sir."

"It's fine," his professor says, gesturing to his desk. "Just take your file and sit down. We only started a minute ago."

Will feels dread well up inside him as he takes the final brown, manila folder left on Crawford's desk and finds a seat next to his roommate, Beverly Katz.

He opens his file and his stomach sinks.

Beverly swears, leaning over to get a peek at it. "You got stuck with Hannibal the Cannibal, didn't you?"

Will nods miserably, listening to Crawford's lecture.

"You'll be attending weekly interviews for a total of twelve sessions. These will be unsupervised and unrecorded, so be sure to take notes. You have a week to study your subject. Learn about their crimes. Try to get a feel of who they are so you'll know how to earn their trust and respect so you can get them to answer your questions."

Bev raises her hand. "What sorts of questions should we ask?"

"A standard questionnaire can be found in your dropbox. Print it out and study it. I do not want to see blank spaces. If you can't get your subject to answer, make your own deductions. Remember, this is vital information to the BAU. Also, keep in mind that many killers have a history of lying and manipulation. Try not to get pulled in. If at any time you feel threatened by your subject, inform me."

Will feels like this is directed solely at him.

"We'll be going over some basic interview techniques today, so pay attention."

Crawford begins to outline some standard tactics: "Information is key. The more you know about your subject, the easier it is to understand them. Getting them to open up is another matter. Some subjects are eager to talk about their lives. Others will be more resistant. Don't be discouraged. Sometimes it can take years for any progress to be made."

After class, Crawford calls out, "Wait a moment, Mr. Graham. I want to talk to you."

Will stays behind, nervously shuffling as the other students gather up their things and leave.

"I'm sorry I was late today, sir. It won't happen again."

Crawford shakes his head. "Not important. It's a new semester. A lot of students have difficulty finding their classrooms in the first week. Just don't make a habit of it."

Will smiles, relieved. "Thank you, sir."

"That's not what I wanted to talk about." Crawford adjusts his grip on his cane. "I just wanted to say that I'm looking forward to your report, but if you feel like backing out, I'll understand."

Will's smile gets a bit more strained, and even though he knows he's being manipulated, there's nothing he can do to stop the indignant emotions from rising up in him. "I'll be fine, sir."

Crawford claps him on the shoulder. “Good man.”

3

“What was that about?” Bev asks as they meet up in the cafeteria.

Will grimaces. “Just wanted to make sure I’m okay with interviewing Hannibal Lecter.”

“And are you?”

“Ask me after we eat.”

After they get their food, they sit down to plan a bit before their next class, Advanced Human Anatomy and Physiology.

“I’ll partner with you for labs, but you have to help me study the theory,” Bev insists.

“Sure, no problem.”

“Also, would you mind giving me a few hints?” she asks slyly, sliding a folder over to him. He recognizes it as the file for Garret Jacob Hobbs, and scoffs.

“Do your own profiling, Bev.”

“Come on! I’m not asking you to write the whole thing. Just give me something to go on.” She gives him a pleading look.

Will sighs. “Try to talk to him yourself. If you’re still having trouble after a few interviews, I’ll take a look.”

“And give me some insight,” she says, looking smug.

“Only if I see something.”

“You *always* see something. It’s your superpower.”

Will shifts, uncomfortable.

Bev catches on and changes the subject.

“So, Hannibal Lecter, huh?”

Will sighs, putting his head down on his arms. “Yeah.”

“This will be his fifth interview since he was captured, right?”

“He’s been interviewed a lot more than five times. This is just the fifth time a *student* will be interviewing him.”

“To be honest, I’m kind of shocked that they’re still allowing it. I mean, how many students have ended up dead because of him?”

“Only one, technically. Sarah Jean Mason allegedly killed herself because of him. The others are still alive.”

“Didn’t the first woman who interviewed him end up dropping out of school because of a drug habit or something?”

“Yeah, Amelia Porter. And Daria Samsen was institutionalized after a suicide attempt.”

“Let’s not even talk about Randall Tier. I still have nightmares about that crazy bastard.” She shudders, wrapping her arms around herself.

“You should’ve stayed off Tattle Crime. You *know* Lounds always takes the most grotesque pictures.”

“Grotesque is right. That trucker was just…ripped open, torn into like a wild animal got to him. And that creepy bone suit. Ugh!”

He looks up and smiles at her. “You really know how to make a guy feel better, Bev,” he says wryly.

“Just promise you’ll warn me if you feel like killing yourself.”

His smile vanishes. “That’s not funny.”

“I’m not joking. Lecter clearly knows how to mess with people. I don’t want to read about you on Tattle Crime someday.”

Will snorts. “Yeah, somehow I doubt I’d ever be sensational enough for the likes of Freddie Lounds.”

“Will,” Bev says, giving him a *mom-look.*

He sighs. “Fine, I promise I’ll warn you if I start to feel suicidal. Satisfied?”

Bev smiles. “Very, now finish your lunch. We need to get to Anatomy. I hear Professor Breitkopf can be a real hardass when you turn up late for class.”

“Great,” he grumbles, finishing his ham sandwich.

4

Professor Breitkopf is an older man with a forgettable face, and a placid expression.

He is also entirely too interested in cutting people open.

Will makes a mental note to avoid getting on his bad side, just in case.

His final class is Stress and Mental Heath. He took it mostly to see if anything he learned could help him with his own stress management.

The class ends at 1:00, and Will feels relief that the day is over.

5

Once he gets home, he downloads the questionnaire from the dropbox, studying the questions so he knows what to ask.

What was his/her early childhood like? How did he/she perform in school? What is his/her work history like? What triggered him/her to start killing? How did he/she select his/her victims?

Most of the other questions request details of the murder victims, wanting to know specifically how they died, so Will spends the rest of the afternoon looking them up and filling in the answers.

Victim #1 – Michelle Vocalson – 43 – Killed December 13th, 2008 – liver removed, clothing sewn directly into skin, found in a clothing store

Victim #2 – Benjamin Raspail – 47 – Killed December 17th, 2008 – thymus and pancreas removed, heart pierced with a stiletto knife, found in a church pew

Victim #3 – Christopher Word – 37 – Killed December 22nd, 2008 – brain removed, hands burned, found in his office

Victim #4 – Andrew Caldwell – 38 – Killed June 9th, 2010 – heart and kidneys removed, hands and feet pierced by dirty needles, found in his office

Victim #5 – Mia Foster – 29 – Killed June 12th, 2010 – tongue removed, mouth and eyes sewn shut, found on her porch

Victim #6 – Sheldon Isley – 32 – Killed June 18th, 2010 – every organ except for lungs removed, turned into a tree, found in parking lot

Victim #7 – Darrell Ledgerwood – 34 – Killed May 6th, 2011– lungs removed, tongue used as bookmark in bible, found in a church pew

Victim #8 – Jeremy Olmstead – 24 – Killed May 8th, 2011 – heart removed, made to look like the Wound Man, found in his workshop

By the time he goes to bed, he has most of the information he needs to make a profile, and wonders if he could get out of the interviews altogether.

He admits to himself that it's very unlikely, especially since Crawford is expecting him to look for details beyond the obvious when it comes to Dr. Lecter.

6

That night he dreams that a faceless creature is chasing him through a forest, wielding a long blade.

He wakes in a sweat, shaking and panting in his room.

He groans, getting out of bed, and goes downstairs to cook breakfast for himself and his two roommates, Beverly and Ardelia.

“Eggs, toast, and bacon. You truly know the way to a woman’s heart, Graham,” Beverly says, taking a seat at the kitchen table.

Ardelia takes her nose out of her book long enough to give him a quick, “Thanks,” before returning to her reading.

Will just smiles and tries to avoid looking at the knives.

7

His and Bev’s first class, Anatomy, doesn’t start until 10:00, so they spend the morning going over their notes before heading to school.

“Take it easy, Will,” Bev warns, grabbing his shaking hand to steady it as he hovers over a disembodied eyeball, scalpel gripped tight.

He licks his lips, shaking all over. “I don’t think I can do this, Bev,” he says, handing the scalpel over to her.

Dr. Breitkopf was very eager to start their first lab, and decided that dissecting a human eye was the best way to introduce his students to the wonderful world of human anatomy.

“Eyes are the mirrors of the soul, after all,” he’d stated at the beginning of class, smiling fondly down at the containers full of eyeballs. “Just make sure they don’t end up rolling around on the floor, or I’ll start docking marks.”

Beverly has no problem slicing into the cornea and pinning it so it doesn’t flap back onto the iris and pupil. “You just have to be quick and clean. Don’t even think about it.”

“Easy for you to say. It’s staring at me,” he retorts, using her body as a shield.

Why did I sign up for this?

8

On Friday, he goes to Alana Bloom’s office during his break to discuss his thesis, “On the Making of Monsters”.

He knocks on the door, and she opens it, smiling when she sees it’s him. “Hey, Will. How was your holiday?”

He smiles back at her, relieved to see a friendly face. “Pretty good, I guess. A little strange without my dad, but Ardelia and I managed.”

She gives him a somber nod. “Holidays are always the hardest after you’ve lost a family member.” She ushers him inside and he takes his seat in an armchair with a foldout desk.

“Did you get any work done over the break?” she asks, leaning against her desk, but not sitting down yet.

He shakes his head sheepishly. “I found a few new articles, but I really wanted to discuss them with you before I wrote anything else.”

Dr. Bloom waves it off. “Well, as long as you’re doing *something.*”

They hover over his laptop for a long time, him pointing out the passages he wants to cite for his paper.

It’s just about time for him to leave when Dr. Bloom perks up. “Oh, I almost forgot to ask. You’re in Jack Crawford’s Forensic Psychology class, aren’t you?”

He hesitates for a moment, already knowing where this is going. She’s known about him attending that class since last semester, but it’s only in the second half that they actually do the interview project.

“Yeah,” he says, trailing off.

She gives him a strained smile. “So, who did you pick to interview?”

Will grimaces, tightening his grip of the strap of his book-bag. “I didn’t exactly *pick* him. I was late, and his was the only folder left.”

Dr. Bloom frowns. “Oh, don’t tell me. Hannibal Lecter.”

He nods reluctantly, looking away. “It’s not a big deal,” he says, trying to shrug it off.

“I can’t *believe* Jack has the nerve to do this again,” she says harshly, going over to her desk. “I ought to write to the dean.”

Will flinches away. “Oh, don’t do that. I already said it’d be fine.”

She looks over her shoulder, and, realizing she may be acting a little irrational, forces herself to relax. “Just promise you’ll speak to me if anything he says makes you uncomfortable.”

He nods, heading for the door. “Sure.”

“I mean it, Will,” she says firmly. “Hannibal Lecter is *dangerous.* Behind bars or not. I don’t want to see you get hurt.”

The obvious compassion in her expression warms him, making him smile. “Thanks, Dr. Bloom. I promise I’ll be careful.”

First Impressions

Chapter Summary

Will meets Hannibal. Hannibal is Hannibal. Will is a sassy little muffin. That's about it.

Chapter Notes

So, you know how I said yesterday that I'd update every 2-3 days? I lied. Editing is going faster than I thought, so I'm going to try to update every day.

On that note, thanks for all the responses! Oh, and don't ever be worried about offending me over constructive criticism. I'm a big girl. I know I'm not perfect yet, but I'm working on it.

Now, before we start, I just want to say that the canon relationship between Will and Hannibal is messed up. I know it. We all know it. But as a public service announcement, I just want to clarify one of the warning signs of a dangerous relationship for those who might have missed it.

If your significant other ever tries to saw your head open so they can eat your brain...you might want to consider seeing other people.

Now, let's get back into this totally not messed up fanfic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Saturday, Jan 16th, 2016

Before being taken to see Lecter, Will goes to meet the administrator of the BSHCI, Dr. Chilton. The man's office is covered in plaques for various achievements, all on display for anyone who walks in. His desk is large, and his own chair makes him sit a few inches taller than his guests.

"Ah, Will Graham. Jack Crawford said you'd be here by 7:00." He looks pointedly at the wall clock displaying the time as 7:08.

Will forces himself not to glare at the man. He'd been told to arrive twenty minutes before his appointment with Lecter, and he had.

"I guess it's fine. Not like you'll get much out of him anyway," Chilton mutters under his breath, just loud enough for Will to hear.

He takes a deep, silent breath, pushing down the urge to smash Chilton's face into one of those plaques. “What’s your opinion of him, Doctor?” he asks, honestly curious about what the man who’s kept watch over Lecter for years thinks.

“Oh, he’s a monster,” Chilton replies, completely cavalier. “Pure psychopath. So rare to capture one alive. From a research point of view, Lecter is our most prized asset.”

Will can’t help but bristle at the way Chilton speaks about Lecter, but manages to hide behind his notebook before his distaste becomes obvious.

“We’ve tried to study him, of course, but he’s much too sophisticated for the standard tests. I don’t understand why Crawford continues to bother sending students our way. Nothing ever comes of it, except that Lecter gets a bit of entertainment. Hopefully you’re not intending to have a breakdown or go on a killing spree?” Chilton sticks a pen between his teeth, twirling it obnoxiously.

Keep talking like that and I might.

Will’s smile is brittle, but Chilton hardly looks at him.

“Well, maybe a new face will get him to open up a bit. He might not have the best relationship with some of the people here,” Will suggests.

Chilton snorts. “You got that right, kid. Oh my, does he hate us. Thinks I’m his nemesis.”

Will snorts back, privately thinking that Chilton would never rank above mild annoyance in anyone’s eyes.

“I should probably go over the rules for you. We keep him behind bullet-proof glass. Do not touch the glass. Do not approach the glass. You pass him nothing but soft paper – no pencils or pens. No staples or paperclips in his paper. Use the sliding food tray, no exceptions. If he attempts to pass you anything, do not accept it. Do you understand me?”

Will nods hesitantly. “You’re very cautious with him,” he notes.

Chilton perks up, finding an opening to tell a story. He pulls out a photograph from his desk. “Lecter was a very cooperative patient for three years, never caused any trouble – aside from his dealings during student interviews – and then one day he complained of chest pains and was taken to the dispensary. His mouthpiece and restraints were removed for an EKG. When the nurse leaned over him, he did this to her.”

Will takes the opportunity to slip on his reading glasses, an unnecessary accessory, but one which helps him deal with unpleasant people like Chilton. The black frames cut through the man’s face as he hands Will the photograph.

Will looks down at it, and shudders with the realization that Lecter had done that *with his teeth.*

“Surgeons managed to reset her jaw – more or less. Saved one of her eyes. His pulse never got above 85, even when he ate her tongue.”

There's just a tad too much glee in Chilton's tone when he tells him this, and Will is relieved when the interview ends.

An orderly named Barney Matthews leads him down to Hannibal Lecter's cell.

"If you need assistance, one of us will be ready to help," he says politely, lumbering along.

Will likes him immediately. "Got any advice on how to survive this?" he asks, half-jokingly.

Barney looks as though he's taking the question very seriously, though. "Dr. Lecter dislikes rude people, so try not to be discourteous if you want him to open up."

Will nods, privately wondering if his big mouth will get him in trouble on the first day.

"We'll have cameras on you, but the audio will be turned off. We can't afford to keep him completely unmonitored, but nothing is being recorded."

Will highly doubts Lecter cares about a few cameras.

Barney holds open the gate for him, gesturing he should go inside. "Dr. Lecter is in the last block. Just watch out for Miggs. He's a bit excitable."

There are four cells in Lecter's block. The first one contains Dr. Abel Gideon, who perks up when he sees Will walk by.

The next room contains a large, black man who doesn't seem to notice anything happening around him, his fingers working in his lap as if knitting.

The third cell contains a jumpy, skinny, pale man with messy hair and wild eyes. He leaps out of his bed and wraps his hands around the bars of his cell, leering at Will. This must be Miggs then.

"Pretty, pretty. I used to *fuck* pretty boys like you until they couldn't even *scream.*" He licks his lips obscenely, making slurping noises.

Will ignores him, adjusting his glasses to cut off his view of the creepy man.

In the final cell, Dr. Lecter is already looking up from behind his desk, apparently awaiting his arrival.

His first thought upon seeing the man's face is, *Exquisite.* Lecter's eyes are dark, with flecks of red within them. His hair is a mixture of light brown, blond, and gray. He looks almost gaunt, cheekbones jutting out, looking sharp enough to cut someone. The corners of his thin lips are turned upwards, but Will wouldn't say he is smiling.

There's a yellow plastic chair in front of the glass, so Will sets his book-bag down and sits, pulling his coat off to hang on the back of it. Doing so exposes the white button up shirt and dark blue blazer that he'd picked out specifically for this meeting. He'd forgone the necktie, knowing it would cause more discomfort than it was worth.

“Good evening,” Lecter greets politely, as if this is a friendly chat between neighbours.

Will responds in kind, carefully avoiding eye contact with the help of his glasses. “Good evening, Dr. Lecter. I’m Will Graham.”

“My new interviewer. You look a bit younger than the last batch.”

He shrugs. “That’s because I probably am.”

“How old are you?”

“Twenty.”

“My, my, not even old enough to drink yet.” There is something sly in Dr. Lecter’s expression, but Will presses on.

“Not a big deal. I don’t plan on drinking much anyway, even when I’m old enough.”

Lecter's lips move slightly, but he continues talking before Will can analyze the response. “Tell me, did you skip grades in school? You are a bit younger than Jack’s usual students.”

No surprise there. Most of Crawford’s class is made up of older men and women in their late twenties or thirties. Will is probably the youngest pupil he’s ever taught.

Will shakes his head. “No, I was homeschooled. We moved around a lot when I was a kid. It was easier to study at home than to change schools all the time.”

“And so you attained your high school equivalence early.”

Will nods. “Yeah, I was sixteen. I worked for a year, and then I started university when I was seventeen.”

“Must have been lonely, growing up like you did. Never staying in the same place long enough to make friends.” Lecter almost sounds sympathetic.

Will doesn’t give the man a reaction. “I was fine with being on my own. I always had books.”

“And your parents? Was it difficult for them to support a gifted mind like yours, Will?”

Will looks away, struggling to hide a grimace. “I didn’t need any support. I studied on my own, and considering I practically aced my GED, I’d say I did well enough.”

“Did your parents work long hours?”

Will is beginning to feel uneased by Lecter’s curiosity, but knows that not answering could be considered *rude.* “My dad took whatever work he could get when I was younger. His great-uncle passed away when I was twelve and left him his auto-shop. The money was a lot better, but he usually worked pretty long hours.”

“And when he wasn’t working, I assume he crawled into a bottle and left you to yourself,” Dr. Lecter deduces, his tone shifting to something sharper. Will looks back at him, surprised by the change, and Lecter smirks. “You didn’t mention a mother, so I assume she took off and left you behind. Probably worried you would end up just like your father. I bet she’d be sorry now, what with all you’ve accomplished, clever little boy that you are. Got into a good school and wear good clothes and try so hard to fit into your new world, but you don’t, and everyone can see it. You could go on to be a Nobel Prize winner and people would still be able to tell that you’re nothing more than trailer trash trying to cover up your stench with some cheap aftershave.”

Will drops his head down, not making eye contact with the older man, then suddenly starts to laugh.

He takes off his glasses and looks up at Lecter, grinning. “Is that really the best you’ve got? I’m *trailer trash?*” He scoffs, smile dropping away. “If you were hoping that would make me go home and slit my wrists, you’re going to be seriously disappointed. I’ve heard better insults on the playground.” He leans forward. “Is that seriously all you had to do to make those other students want to kill themselves? If that’s the case, then maybe they really *did* have other issues.” He narrows his eyes and sits up straighter in the uncomfortable chair. “You made the assumption that my self-worth is based on what a bunch of snobs think of me. It isn’t. I’m *proud* of what I’ve accomplished. I’ve got two professors fighting over the chance to mentor me. Whatever I choose to do in life, I’m going to make a difference. *That’s* what I care about.”

This is bad. He’s getting too emotional. He forces himself to calm down, leaning back and crossing his arms. “I have to admit, Dr. Lecter, hypocrisy isn’t the best look for you.”

Dr. Lecter looks dangerous when he speaks, face as hard as stone. “I beg your pardon?”

Will shrugs again, smirking. “Well, you said no one would ever see me as more than trailer trash, but at least I can only go up from here. Even with all your past accomplishments, no one is going to remember you as anything more than *Hannibal the Cannibal.*”

The pencil in Lecter’s hand snaps in two. “I think you should leave.”

Will looks at the broken pencil, losing some of his bravado as he slips his glasses back on, then dons his coat. “Yeah, I guess I should. Goodbye, Dr. Lecter,” he replies, standing up and grabbing his book-bag. He looks over his shoulder as he walks away. “Crawford wanted me to get inside your head, but to be honest, I don’t find you that interesting.”

Will starts to leave – only then noticing the grunting noises coming from the next cell – and just barely avoids having his face covered in the aftermath of Miggs's *excitement.* It splatters on his coat instead, sliding down in white clumps, sending Miggs into hysterics. He bounces over to the door of his cell, jumpsuit hanging off of one of his legs, and wraps his hands around the bars, still cackling when he sees the stain on Will’s coat.

Will quickly removes the tarnished clothing, giving serious thought to burning his whole outfit once he gets home.

One of the orderlies hears Miggs's laughter, and opens the gate separating him from the hallway, marching down it as rage seeps from every pore.

“Damnit, Miggs! Shut up!” he yells, hitting the hysterical man’s fingers with his nightstick, breaking them with a sickening crunch.

Will mimics Miggs’s response instinctively, jumping back and clutching at his hand.

“Settle down!” Will orders, still cradling his fingers. He looks at the orderly, idly noting that the man dyes his hair brown, as his roots are bright red.

“Crazy bastard deserved it,” the orderly mutters harshly.

Miggs is whimpering in the corner of his cell, clutching at his hand, and Will feels overcome with sympathy, even though it’s the man’s own fault.

He kneels down, seeing Lecter approach the glass out of the corner of his eye. Will ignores the doctor in favour of the wounded patient. “Hey, it’s okay, Miggs. I’ll get Barney and he’ll get you fixed up.”

Miggs peeks out at him, shivering, and nods.

Will gets back up and notes that the orderly looks ready to hit someone again.

“I’d like to go now,” he says, before the man gets any ideas.

He stuffs his coat into the trash bin on the way to the lobby, and tells Barney about Miggs’s injury.

Barney seems upset, and immediately heads to Miggs’s cell to check up on him.

Will leaves, a little dejected that he screwed up his chance of getting into Lecter’s head, and wonders how he’ll break the news to Crawford.

He drives home, walking through the front door and turning to the left instead of going up the stairs to his studio apartment.

Beverly is at another friend’s house for the weekend, so it’s just him and Ardelia for now. Ardelia Mapp is a pre-law student, and someone who knows a bit about Lecter’s infamous crimes.

As he enters the living room, he hears Aerosmith’s “Dream On” blasting through the speakers of the television.

Ardelia has a textbook out in front of her, and is making notes, chewing on her pencil.

“Do I even want to know?” Will asks.

Ardelia looks up, startled, and turns the music down. “Oh, hey! How’d it go?”

There's no sign of real concern in her expression, just curiosity, and Will relaxes. "Well, Lecter called me trailer trash, and one of the other inmates jerked off and threw his semen all over my coat," he answers nonchalantly.

Ardelia flinches. "Ouch! Guess you'll need to go shopping."

He smiles, finally feeling at ease. "Okay, seriously, Aerosmith?" he asks, pointing his thumb at the speakers.

She frowns. "It's a mnemonic tactic. I'm reading about a man named Kenneth Parks. He went to his in-laws' house and stabbed his mother-in-law to death and nearly killed his father-in-law, all while he was sleepwalking."

Will pauses thoughtfully. "I think I read a book about that once. Didn't his whole family have some sort of REM sleep disorder? I think I remember he once nearly jumped out a window when he was six during an episode."

Ardelia stares. "When did you read that?"

He shrugs. "Five, six years ago. I remember he went to a police station and confessed, but couldn't even remember what happened. He just woke up and his hands were covered in blood. A cop read him his Miranda Rights a couple times because he wasn't even sure Parks was aware of what was going on. He had a gambling problem, right? And he was going to visit his in-laws the next day to ask them for help?"

"I hate you."

"What?" he responds, taken aback.

"I've gone over this three times and I still can't get the facts straight. You read a book five years ago and you recall everything."

He ducks his head sheepishly. "I don't, not really. It was a good book, that's all."

Ardelia bangs her head against her textbook and mumbles, "Shoo! Leave me to my misery."

"You still haven't explained the Aerosmith."

She raises her head, propping it up with her hand. "Like I said, it's a mnemonic tactic. I'm trying to make my brain associate certain cases with certain songs so I can recall the information easier."

He tries to digest this. "Is it working?"

"I hope so. My scholarship depends on it."

Will shuffles uncomfortably. "You'll get it. Don't stress."

She smiles softly. "Thanks. Good luck on your next interview. I hope it goes better than today's."

Chapter End Notes

So, yeah, their first meeting didn't go too well. Kinda like in the show.

Hannibal is a bit of a bitch. I was watching a few scenes from Silence of the Lambs, (also where I got most of Chilton's dialogue), and he really tears into Clarice on their first meeting. I know Movie Hannibal isn't quite the same as TV Hannibal, but considering they've both been locked away for years, I figured my Hannibal would be a bit more like him.

I'm rambling again. I'll just say I hope you liked it.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Consequences

Chapter Summary

Will deals with the fallout of his first meeting with Dr. Lecter, and finds himself more determined than ever to unlock the man's secrets.

Chapter Notes

Another day, another chapter. At this rate, I'll be finished before March.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, January 17th – Friday, January 22nd

When Will gets home, he decides to browse online for a few hours to distract himself. There's a few stories about David Bowie and Alan Rickman's deaths, but they just rehash what he's already heard.

With a little more digging, he finds an updated news report about a woman – Lorna Raspail – searching for her missing son – Kilian Raspail. There's a shot of her holding a picture of her son, both of them with bright red hair and angular features.

"Probably ran away," he says to himself.

The Raspails were mildly infamous, both for Benjamin Raspail's death at the hands of Hannibal Lecter, and for his son's emotional breakdown afterwards.

Kilian Raspail spent a few months in a mental health care facility, and held a legendary grudge against his mother for locking him up. If Will were in his shoes, he'd want to get away for a while too.

Will shuts down his computer, too tired to search for more articles, and collapses into bed.

He is woken up early the next morning by his phone ringing. He recognizes the number for the BSHCI and feels a sense of dread.

Will answers it to find that it's the kind orderly he met yesterday, Barney Matthews.

"*Hey there, Mr. Graham. I'm sorry to wake you so early, but I thought you'd want to know as soon as possible. Ivo Miggs – the inmate who was injured earlier – he killed himself a few hours ago.*"

Will's stomach drops, and he feels momentarily ill. "What happened?" he asks, fearing the answer.

"*From what I understand. Dr. Lecter probably talked him into it.*"

"How? How did he kill himself?"

Barney hesitates. "*He…bit through his tongue and bled out. He was on blood-thinners, you see. He gets – used to get – a lot of clots in his legs. Dr. Lecter knew that.*"

"What makes you think Dr. Lecter made him do it?"

"*The night orderly said he heard Dr. Lecter whispering to Miggs a couple times last night. He went to get some coffee. Wasn't gone ten minutes, and when he got back, Miggs was already dead.*"

"Shit," Will mutters, rubbing his eyes. "Why do I get the feeling this is my fault?"

"*I'm not saying that, Mr. Graham. No one is. Dr. Lecter has done things like this in the past. There's talk about moving him to another cell in a few months. One that's more isolated. I just wanted to give you a heads up. I'll understand if you don't want to come back next week.*"

Will feels a sense of rising anger, but leashes it as best he can. "No, I'll be fine. I don't scare that easily. Thank you for calling." He hangs up.

Now more determined than ever to get the best of Lecter, Will throws himself into researching the man's victims. He forces himself to go over the details of each murder until they're burned inside his head.

Ardelia drags him out of his room after lunch and takes him shopping for a new coat. He buys her some flash cards to help her study.

Bev doesn't get home until late Sunday night, so they talk about their interviews before class on Monday.

"So, you alright?" she asks.

"I've been better," Will answers honestly. "I got a call yesterday. Dr. Lecter talked one of the other patients into killing himself."

Bev's eyes widen. "Are you kidding me?"

Will shakes his head.

"Shit! Why'd he do it?"

“I think it was to get back at me for insulting him.”

“You *insulted* him?”

“I…may have called him Hannibal the Cannibal.”

“To his face?”

“Uh, yeah. I also might’ve told him he wasn’t that interesting.”

“Jeez, Graham! You know how to strike where it hurts! What brought that on?”

“He cold-read me. Said some things about my dad. I just…reacted.”

Bev reaches out to pat his hand. “Hey, it’s not your fault. Lecter’s legendary for getting under people’s skin. I’m sure Professor Crawford can find someone else for you to interview.”

Will shifts in his seat apprehensively. “I’m not quitting, Bev. I’m going back this week.”

Bev’s eyes widen again. “Wait, what? You *just* said he talked a guy into killing himself, and you want to go back in there?”

He frowns. “I can’t let him scare me off. If I manage to crack him, even a little, it would make my career.”

“You don’t *have* a career yet, Will. Lecter’s dangerous. Just leave him to the professionals.”

“One day *I’ll* be a professional. What will people think of me if I just give up after one week?”

“That you’re a lot smarter than the ones who stuck around until Lecter talked them into killing themselves, or someone else. Remember Randall Tier?”

“Randall Tier was already disturbed before Lecter got a hold of him.”

“Maybe, but who knows what he could bring out in any of us?”

Crawford arrives and they turn to listen, though Beverly keeps shooting him unhappy looks.

“By now you’ve all had your first interview. I want to make it clear once again that if you feel threatened, you can come talk to me.” Crawford glances over at Will, but he stares back unblinking until the professor continues.

“Don’t be discouraged if you don’t feel you’ve accomplished anything. Early interviews are all about building trust. You have to make yourself into a confidant. Some of the subjects don’t have any social interactions outside of guards or psychiatrists, so they may be more willing to converse with you. This doesn’t always mean that they’ll reveal anything important right away. Have patience, be respectful, and don’t give up. I’m not expecting miracles."

He pauses again, shuffling some papers. “While we’re on the subject, would anyone like to discuss their interviews? Just tell everyone who you picked, and a bit of their backstory beforehand.”

As expected, Beverly’s hand is the first one up.

“Ms. Katz?”

“Well, I spoke with Garret Jacob Hobbs, also known as The Minnesota Shrike. He killed eleven people before he was arrested, the last two victims being his wife and daughter. His other victims were all girls in their late teens with dark hair who strongly resembled his daughter. Um, the autopsies of his wife and daughter, as well as, uh, a stool sample from Hobbs, proved that he fed the girls’ remains to his family. He returned a girl named Elise Nichols to her bedroom. Um, it was determined she had liver cancer, so Hobbs likely didn’t have any use for her since he couldn’t…you know…eat her.”

She clears her throat. “Investigators found traces of antler velvet and pipe thread on her body. This eventually led to his capture. His last victim – before his wife and daughter – was Cassie Boyle. Police theorized that he was spiralling after screwing up with Elise Nichols. He removed her lungs while she was still alive and mounted her on a stag’s antlers in the middle of a field. When police arrived at his house later that week, he had already killed his wife, and his daughter was in critical condition. She died en route to the hospital.”

The other students try hard not to look disgusted, and most of them fail. Will, however, listens to the report with interest.

“And how did your interview go?” Crawford asks.

Beverly bites her lip. “Uh, well, he wasn’t exactly chatty. The guards told me ahead of time that he doesn’t really talk to anyone and that I shouldn’t take it personally. I’m hoping next week will be better.”

Crawford nods. “Just keep at it.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr. Graham, how about you go next?”

Will shrinks down in his seat a bit, before taking a breath, and sitting up straight. “I doubt Dr. Hannibal Lecter needs much of an introduction.”

A few of the other students chuckle at that, but fall silent under Crawford’s stern gaze.

“Indulge me. I need to know if you know the material.”

Will sighs internally and begins to recite what he pieced together. “He was born November 22, 1973, somewhere in Europe, but has refused to confirm which country he originates from. He attended the University of Paris in 1990, specializing in surgery, and graduated a year early with honours. In 1995 he immigrated to America, and began working as a surgeon at Johns Hopkins until the year 2003, at which point he went back to school, and changed

careers to become one of the most sought-after psychiatrists in Maryland. In December, 2008, he began killing people by removing their organs while they were still alive, feeding them to guests at his parties, and staging their bodies in increasingly elaborate ways. Police started calling him the Chesapeake Ripper."

"I guess you *did* study," Crawford says wryly, eliciting a bit of laughter, though this time it goes unacknowledged. "And your interview, how did that go?"

Will grimaces. "I screwed up, but I'm going back next week."

Crawford frowns. "Screwed up how?"

He shrugs. "We just talked at first. I was trying to build a rapport. He made some assumptions about me based on that, and I responded in turn. He wasn't happy with me and told me to leave." Shrinking down further into his seat, he drops the final bombshell. "And then yesterday morning an orderly called me and said that Dr. Lecter talked one of the other patients into killing himself."

A few of the other students swear under their breath, including Beverly. Some look horrified, while others look smug. Will ignores them all.

Crawford frowns deeply. "Let's talk after class."

The other students give their accounts, but Will mostly tunes them out. He finds himself imagining what Lecter had said, hearing his voice whisper to Miggs in his mind.

You're such a naughty boy, Miggs, ruining Mr. Graham's coat like that. You better be careful, or next time the guard might not stop at just your fingers. Maybe he'll sneak into your cell while you sleep and beat you with that nightstick until you're black and blue, just like daddy used to. Nasty temper, that one has. Do you think he wants to kill you, Miggs? I think he does. I think he's plotting to do just that tonight. Can you fight him off in your state? Maybe he'll stick it up inside you and make you scream until your throat bleeds. Maybe he'll use a knife instead. You know what you should do, Miggs? You should bite through your tongue before he comes back. It'll be much quicker than what he has planned. Quickly now. Do it! I can hear him coming. He's on his way, Miggs.

Will snaps himself out of it just as class ends.

He's trembling and covered in sweat. Bev puts her hand on his shoulder to comfort him. "You okay?"

"Yeah," he reassures her. "Just thinking."

"Well, take it easy. You looked like you were going to puke or something."

Will nods guiltily. "I'm fine, Bev, really."

She doesn't look convinced. "I'll be in the cafeteria if you want to talk."

"I'll see you there."

Crawford calls him up to his desk, and Will reluctantly approaches.

“Alright, explain to me what happened,” Crawford orders.

Will takes a breath and recounts the events.

To say that Crawford isn’t pleased is an understatement.

“He was baiting you, Will, and you fell for it. Building a rapport may be part of the interrogation, but you can’t give too much information to Lecter. He will find your weaknesses in a second and exploit them.”

He hangs his head, ashamed. “I understand, sir.”

“Good, remember that for next week. I’m counting on you, Will.”

Jarred by the abrupt dismissal, Will wanders to the cafeteria in a daze.

Bev accosts him, saying she wants to talk in private.

Will doesn’t resist as she drags him outside and seats herself at a bench. “So, talk.”

He shrugs. “There really isn’t much to talk about. Lecter’s craftier than I thought. I just have to be smarter next time.”

“I don’t like this ‘next time’ spiel. The guy killed someone – from his cell – and you want to go back there?”

He sighs, forcing himself to make eye contact with her. “I *need* to confront him, Bev. I won’t be able to live with myself if I just walk away. If I go into forensic psychology, I’ll be dealing with people like Dr. Lecter for the rest of my life.”

“Most psychos don’t kill people from behind bars.”

“Actually, he’s behind bullet-proof glass. They reinforced his cell after he bit a nurse’s face off.”

“Oh, well that just makes *everything* alright.”

Will huffs. “Bev, I’m going back.”

She sighs. “Of course you are. Why did I ever think I could change your mind? You’re too stubborn for your own good.”

“If it makes you feel better, I don’t feel suicidal yet, although I wouldn’t mind tearing Lecter a new one for messing with Miggs.”

“Do they know why Lecter killed this guy?”

Will has a sudden flash of memory from that day, seeing Lecter’s face out of the corner of his eye. The man had looked at him with something akin to interest.

Will shudders. “Probably because he enjoyed it.”

“Probably?”

“He’s difficult to read,” Will explains, knowing she’s asking about his ability to sense Lecter’s emotions the way he does with everyone else. “I’ll crack him, don’t worry.”

“I kind of hope you don’t. That whole ‘looking into the abyss’ thing.”

Will frowns at her. “That’s not going to happen. I know what I’m getting into.”

Bev shrugs. “If you’re sure.”

“I am. Now, you want to go over your notes before class?”

Chapter End Notes

Oh, Will. You don't know what you're up against. Don't worry. You'll find out soon.

And about Miggs biting through his tongue and bleeding out, yeah, apparently it's impossible to swallow your tongue (so long as it's still attached), and even biting it off won't necessarily kill you. Mouth wounds clot quickly. The blood-thinners made his death more believable, because if I'm going to kill somebody, I'm going to do it right. (And, yes, this is the stuff I looked up that's going to put me on a watch list.)

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Apologies

Chapter Summary

Will and Abel Gideon have a nice chat. Hannibal is still a smug s.o.b.

Chapter Notes

I'm going out shopping later, so I figured I'd better put this one out a little earlier.

Here's their second interview. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 2 – Saturday, January 23rd, 2016

Will has to wait a few minutes as Dr. Lecter is fetched from solitary. It's hardly the first time the doctor has been sentenced there, and Will highly doubts it will have any real affect on the man.

He's leaning against the wall next to the gate when an accented voice calls out, "Well, back again, I see."

Will starts, swivelling his head to look into the first cell.

Abel Gideon is leaning against the bars, staring up at him.

Will has a thought that he doesn't *look* crazy enough to be here, but then again, neither does Hannibal Lecter.

He focuses on the man's goatee as he answers, avoiding eye contact with the man. "It wouldn't look good if I gave up after one session," he explains, seeing no reason not to chat with someone who looks semi-aware of his surroundings.

Gideon grins. "Well, you're more tenacious than most of the shrinks I've dealt with. Tell me, Mr. Graham, are you aware that *I* was once suspected of being the Chesapeake Ripper?"

Will scoffs unthinkingly, drawing Gideon's attention even more firmly on to him.

"Something amusing about that, Mr. Graham?"

Will wonders if he's somehow offended the man, and – not wanting a repeat performance of last week – he quickly stammers out an explanation. "Well, I mean, you have similar profiles. You're both intelligent, cultured, and have the necessary surgical skills, but as far as temperament goes…" He trails off, looking Gideon up and down before ducking his head. "You're two entirely different people. Lecter is control personified; you're not nearly as uptight."

"Ooh! You're giving me *shivers,* Mr. Graham," Gideon replies dramatically. "I'd've liked to have had you around when I was dating. Would've made finding a woman who wouldn't turn into a cheating skank a hell of a lot easier."

Will gives him a strained smile and allows his eyes to drift around the hallway.

The black man in the cell next to Gideon still hasn't moved an inch since the last time Will saw him. Will wonders if the man is even capable of going to the bathroom on his own.

"Don't mind old Farley. He hasn't spoken a word since he arrived. Catatonia, you see," Gideon reassures Will, seeing where his gaze has wandered. "I doubt he even knows where he is."

"What happened to him?" Will asks unthinkingly.

Gideon gives him a piercing stare. "Odd question, Mr. Graham. Most people ask what's *wrong* with him."

Feeling unnerved, he pulls his glasses out of his pocket, wipes the lenses using his sweater, and puts them on, cutting off his view of the talkative man. "Guess I'm not most people."

Gideon leans back, smiling smugly. "Mr. Portlock has bipolar I, you see – diagnosed when he was in college. He went into a severe depression several years ago and attempted suicide. He had a gun to his head when his girlfriend came home. She wrestled with him for it, and the gun went off in *her* head instead. Mr. Portlock has been catatonic ever since. A rather dismal tale, don't you agree?"

Will frowns. "Then what is he doing here? If it was an accident, he shouldn't be in a place like this."

Gideon shrugs. "Blame the prosecution. Apparently Mr. Portlock forgot to attend the safety course before purchasing his handgun, therefore his possession of it was *illegal.*"

Will scowls, pushing his glasses up when they begin to slip down his nose. "That's bullshit. It's pretty obvious that his state of mind made him unable to think about his *safety.*"

Gideon throws his head back and laughs, loud and obnoxious. "Oh, I *like you,* Mr. Graham. It's no wonder Dr. Lecter killed Miggs for you."

Will finally makes eye contact with the man, disturbed by the gleeful grin on his face as he stares up at Will.

"I'm not sure what you mean, Dr. Gideon."

Gideon smirks and closes his eyes for a moment. “Oh, I caught a few words of your exchange last week. Got to say, you really know how to ruffle Lecter’s feathers. I’ve *never* heard him sound so pissed off. That is until that whole thing with Multiple Miggs.” He opens his eyes, and they glint with excitement. “You were just so *sweet* to him, and after what he did. I’d’ve punch that walking shitstain on humanity right in the cojones, but that’s just me.”

Will shrugs and looks down, feeling awkward. “Well, the bars would’ve made that a bit difficult. Plus, I didn’t want my hands anywhere his…*cojones*.”

Gideon grins broadly. “Oh, Dr. Lecter is going to have *fun* with you, Mr. Graham. *You* might not have found him interesting, but he certainly doesn’t feel the same way about you,” he finishes in a singsong voice.

Will frowns at him. “What are you–”

At that moment, Dr. Lecter is finally wheeled down the hall towards his cell.

Will avoids eye contact, feeling even more awkward around Dr. Lecter than the week before.

“It was nice speaking with you, Dr. Gideon,” Will tells the smirking patient.

“Oh, drop by *anytime,* Mr. Graham.”

Will smiles at him weakly, but finally delays no longer.

He gives Mr. Portlock a somber look as he passes by, but the man doesn’t acknowledge him.

The two orderlies walk by him as he walks to Lecter’s cell. One is the angry man from last week, and with him is a taller, broader, dark-haired man who gives Will an appreciative look as he passes by.

Will stubbornly ignores them and tries not to blush under the attention.

He makes it to Lecter’s cell, resisting the urge to turn around and run away, and sits on the plastic seat laid out for him.

He idly notes that all the drawings and books, as well as his toilet, have been removed, but doesn’t say anything.

Lecter breaks the silence. “I must admit, I’m a bit surprised to see you again, Mr. Graham. Your farewell seemed rather final. You didn’t just say goodbye, though, did you? That little extra bit at the end. What was that you said?” Lecter asks, looking smug and not at all concerned by the fact that he stands in a barren room, empty of everything except for a plastic chair and his bed. Will starts thinking about how boring it must be for a man like Lecter to be stuck in a place like that, and finds himself pitying the doctor.

He sighs, lowering his head. “I said that I didn’t find you that interesting.”

“Yes. That extra bit. I believe that’s what they call a ‘mic drop’.”

Will looks up at him in disbelief, then stutters out, “I guess that’s one way of putting it.”

Lecter seems perfectly content to stare at him for the remainder of the hour, so Will shoves his pride aside with a huff, taking his glasses off again to give Lecter his full attention.

“Look, I’m sorry.”

Lecter is momentarily surprised, and prods him to continue with a tilt of his head.

“I’m sorry I insulted you. I mean, you started it, but it was wrong of me to respond like that. I guess when you’re stuck in a place like this you have to find *some way* to entertain yourself.”

Lecter stares at him for a long moment. “I suppose I cannot fault your logic. I apologize as well. I was needlessly antagonistic towards you.”

Will blinks, startled by the easy forgiveness. “I…accept your apology,” he finally responds, not knowing what else to say.

They stare at each other for another moment, before Will begins to feel uncomfortable again.

“I don’t suppose you’d be willing to answer some questions for me today, Dr. Lecter?” he asks without much hope.

Lecter blinks slowly, tilting his head to the other side. “Unfortunately, Mr. Graham, the standard questionnaire you’ve no doubt been given is rather tedious to me. However, if you wish to learn something interesting, you merely have to *ask* me something interesting.”

Will is annoyed, but considers it a small victory. He spends a few moments trying to come up with something that Lecter hasn’t been asked before.

Lecter takes a seat, and Will mimics his posture without thinking.

After a while, Will looks up and catches Lecter smiling at him.

“Why are you smiling?” he asks, anxiety spiking.

“A more interesting question is, why are *you* smiling, Mr. Graham?”

Will feels himself go cold, noticing that he is mimicking the doctor’s posture exactly, and quickly rearranges himself, feeling like he’s shucking off a spider web as he fights to get out of Lecter’s mindset.

Lecter tilts his head, observing him like he’s a slide under a microscope. “Quite an unusual reaction,” he notes.

Will bristles. “It’s not a big deal. Dr. Bloom says I have a lot of empathy. Sometimes I mimic people’s body language without realizing it.” He tries to shrug it off.

“People often do that to get others to like them. It’s a tactic they teach psychiatrists as well.” Lecter smiles. “Are you trying to get me to like you, Will?”

“It’s subconscious,” he insists, ignoring the use of his first name. It feels less strange than being called *Mr. Graham.* “I do it all the time.”

“Fascinating,” Dr. Lecter breathes, eyes drilling into him.

Will looks up challengingly. “Why the interest, Doctor? Would you enjoy seeing yourself reflected in someone else?”

“Imitation *is* the sincerest form of flattery.” His gaze still hasn’t lightened up even a bit.

Will scoffs. “I’ll be back next week, with better questions.”

Lecter bids him farewell, and Will tries not to feel afraid.

Chapter End Notes

Fun fact: I came up with the idea of Will imitating people's body language and speech patterns subconsciously after reading the original draft of the script:

HANNIBAL: During intense conversations, does he adopt your cadence of speech?
He does and Crawford has definitely noticed it before.
JACK CRAWFORD: I thought it was a gimmick to get the back-and-forth going.
HANNIBAL: It’s involuntary. He couldn’t stop himself if he tried.

It's actually a very common thing that people do around those they like, especially spouses. It helps improve communication and increases understanding. The same way smiling can make you feel happier, mimicking someone's body language actually tricks your brain into making you feel a certain way. Once you start understanding how the person you're talking to feels, communication gets easier. It's really fascinating.

Will is such a fun character to write because he's so dynamic. Everyone around him has some influence on his behaviour, and I've tried to incorporate that into my writing. Around Jack Crawford, he's testy and determined. Around Alana Bloom, he's gentle and compassionate, but also a bit vulnerable. And around Hannibal...well, you'll see.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Analysis

Chapter Summary

Will deals with trouble in school, gets some insight from Ardelia, and makes an effort to understand Dr. Lecter better by examining his victims.

Chapter Notes

We're getting so close to the fun chapters. I'm going to do some massive amounts of editing at the library today, so the one chapter per day thing will continue, probably until the entire story is finished. Then, of course, I'll need to start on the sequel.

I've actually never written a story in present tense, but I decided that it would emphasize the immediacy of everything. Reading about something that happened in the past never feels as exciting as seeing it unfold right before your eyes. Just thought I'd mention that if you're the type who doesn't usually read present tense works. (I read a book in high school that was written in present tense. It was strange at first, but it's still one of my favourite books. It's called "Premonitions" by Jude Watson, if you're interested.)

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, January 24th – Friday, January 29th

“You’re sure everything’s alright with Lecter?” Professor Crawford asks once more. He’d asked Will to stay behind after class to talk. Considering how disastrous his and Lecter’s first meeting went, Will can’t even bring himself to protest.

Will nods. “Yes, sir. We’ve reached an accord.”

“An accord?” Crawford’s eyes narrow. “Don’t tell me you made some sort of deal with him.”

“Not like that, Professor. I just need to come up with some better questions.”

“Better questions?” he repeats, looking annoyed.

Will fights the urge to sigh. “Yes, sir. He’s bored with the usual ones. I just need to find a better way of asking.”

Crawford gives him that piercing stare that always sets Will on edge, reminding him that this man was once the best profiler the BAU ever had. “Alright, just don’t screw it up. I’m counting on you, Will.”

Just before Anatomy, Will gets a lecture from Dr. Breitkopf about paying attention in class instead of getting stuck in his head.

“It’s like you’re in your own little world sometimes, Graham. I’ll look at you, and you’ll be staring right through whatever’s in front of you. You need to *concentrate* on what you’re doing, otherwise you make stupid mistakes. Have you considered medication?”

Will visibly recoils, even knowing that the man is likely only suggesting that Will has attention deficit disorder or something similar, and not that he should be on antipsychotics.

“It’s not that, sir. I just…get a little queasy when people’s internal organs are put in front of me.”

The teacher actually smiles at him. “Well, try to get over it. You’ve got one hell of a brain in there. I’d hate to see you waste it.”

“I’m working on it, sir.”

Will tries to focus more during lab, but ends up nearly having a panic attack while watching the teacher dissect a human heart.

He swears he can see the heart *beating* underneath the knife, and when it begins oozing blood, the stain continues to spread, dripping off the desk like a waterfall and sloshing at his feet.

Beverly helps calm him down before his next class, Stress and Mental Health with Dr. Turner.

“I thought we should start doing something new in our class. Have any of you ever meditated before?”

Dr. Turner is easily runner-up in the best looking female professor department. Students who have not already fallen in love with Dr. Bloom see Dr. Turner as a younger, sexier version of the revered doctor. With her dark hair, pale eyes, and full lips, Will can understand the attraction, even though he doesn’t share it himself.

Only a few people nod in response to her question, and she smiles. “Ah, good, so most of your minds are ready to be molded. Just let me hit the lights, and I’ll talk you through your first group meditation.”

Will mostly sits in silence with his head bowed as the professor talks about the benefits of meditation: reduced stress and anxiety, increased concentration and creativity, and well as overall improved health.

In the darkened classroom, they all sit in silence for a long three minutes.

Will privately wonders if one of the other students could choke to death in that time and if anyone would be aware enough to notice.

At the end of the class, Dr. Turner has some final words. “Fear is something that protects us. We evolved fear and anxiety and stress to let us know that something in our environment or in our minds is wrong. We shouldn’t ignore fear completely, but we should not allow it to run our lives.”

Will gets home around 1:30, feeling exhausted, and spends most of the afternoon napping.

He cooks dinner for Beverly and Ardelia, who both have classes until 4:00.

The girls are grateful, digging into spaghetti and meatballs as if it’s the best thing they’ve ever tasted.

“So, Ardelia,” Will asks, spinning some spaghetti around his fork. “Do you know anything about Hannibal Lecter?”

Beverly groans, “You are *obsessed,* Graham.”

Will throws a meatball at her.

Ardelia takes the question seriously, pulling out her notes from last semester in her law class.

“We studied him last year. The pictures were pretty graphic.”

“Pictures?” Will asks, interested.

“Yeah, the pictures of his victims. You can google them, although most aren’t exactly high-definition.”

He nods, tucking that information away for later.

“Did he say anything during his trial?”

Ardelia blows a lock of hair out of her face and rests her chin on her hand. “He said a lot of things. Drove his lawyer crazy. He’d ask him a question, and Lecter would give him a recipe for dip or something. They had a bunch of psychiatrists interview him in private, and I know at least one left in tears. Between you and me, I don’t think Lecter is insane, not by the standards of the M’Naghten Rules anyway. But still, I mean, cutting people up like that and eating them? I can see why the jury thought he was.”

“They felt the same way about Jeffrey Dahmer,” Will argues. “But they found *him* guilty.”

“Yeah, well, Jeffrey Dahmer *explained* his actions. He wanted to create his own zombie sex slaves or something. Lecter never explained why he killed anyone, or why he ate them. Whenever anyone asked, he’d just smile and say, ‘Why not?’”

Beverly shivers. “Okay, no more, *please!* That guy freaks me out.”

Ardelia shrugs. “Hey, you’re the one going into forensics.”

She brushes that off. “Yeah, well, luckily I’ll be working with things that don’t *talk.* I’ll leave the interviews to you two.”

“Thanks for the insight,” Will says, standing up to clear the table.

Ardelia shrugs. “Ask me anything, anytime, except during finals.”

Will spends the week looking up pictures of Dr. Lecter’s victims, finding most of them on Tattle Crime, but even *that* isn’t enough to get into his head, so he gives up for the night and goes to sleep, dreaming of Lecter’s final victim.

On Friday, Will tries to reassure Dr. Bloom that he and Dr. Lecter have worked things out.

She isn’t convinced.

“Are you sure he isn’t just toying with you?”

He scuffs his sneaker on the floor, looking away. “No, but I think I interest him enough that he’ll want me to keep coming back,” Will admits.

She frowns, glaring at a spot just in front of him. “That isn’t good, Will. Just…remember that I’m always available to talk if you need it.”

For homework, Crawford gives the class notes on a murder from a year ago, and asks them to analyze it and profile the killer by Monday.

Will leaves his homework for later, and instead continues looking into Lecter’s victims.

He starts from the beginning. Michelle Vocalson.

He closes his eyes. The pendulum swings.

Ms. Vocalson is a very critical fashionista. One too many derogatory remarks puts her on my list.

I plan to take her liver. She rarely indulges in wine. Only the best for her.

I pick out the dress. It’s long, flowing down to her ankles, backless, with the front being two long strips of fabric that form an X. All the better to cut you with, my dear.

I use a paralytic this time. Sewing is delicate work, and I have no desire to work around her thrashing. Still, she is awake and aware, and that is all that truly matters.

Once the dress has been stitched into flesh, I begin removing the liver. Blood seeps out, dripping down the dress, but luckily is unnoticeable in the dark fabric.

With the organ packed away, I transfer her body to a clothing store. It’s the perfect place to put her.

Will jerks out of his reverie, disgusted yet strangely fascinated.

He continues on to the next one. Benjamin Raspail.

I don't torture this one as long. The stiletto knife plunges into his heart, and I watch as the life leaves his eyes. After that, it's time to work. I slice through his chest, extracting the thymus and pancreas. Placing his body in a church pew is my own little in-joke. Perhaps if he'd spent more time practicing his flute rather than bragging about his (alleged) skills, then maybe I wouldn't have felt the need to silence him.

Will doesn't pause to collect himself. He keeps going.

Christopher Word.

Mr. Word's eyes roll widely as I drill through his skull. I've used a mild sedative, but he is still lucid enough to understand what is happening.

When I'd asked for his services in correcting a problem with my new computer, he'd insinuated, rather insultingly, that something so simple should be easy to fix without him, and that requiring his help spoke rather poorly about my intelligence.

He isn't quite sure where these thoughts are coming from, but they feel right.

Lecter, in the early days, was full of petty vindictiveness. Seeing how he matured as a killer over the years is fascinating. He went underground for eighteen months, and then Andrew Caldwell was found.

Dr. Caldwell has terrible bedside manner. He is abrasive to all his patients. Too many years spent treating drug addicts has made him suspicious of everyone. The implication that I am hiding some illness during a routine checkup insults me.

I take his heart and kidneys as punishment, using his own disgust as a weapon as I plunge four needles contaminated with various diseases into his hands and feet.

Mia Foster.

Ms. Foster gossips insatiably, sitting on her porch and glaring out at the people who walk by, always peeking through her curtains to see into others' houses. She loudly regales whatever tidbits she overhears to her friends via cellphone, and usually in public. It's distasteful to listen to her grating voice.

I take her tongue first, ripping it out at the seams. It bleeds terribly, and her screams soon fade away as she begins to choke on her own blood.

I brought my sewing needles again, but this time I use them on flesh alone, first on her lips, to keep her from unleashing her venomous secrets, and then on her eyes, so she can never use them to spy on anyone again.

Sheldon Isley.

Arrogance is this one's crime. That, and a certain disdain for nature. His concrete lot now paves a once beautiful meadow, the former home to many endangered birds.
I drown him, hanged on a cherry blossom tree. I'm not wasteful with him like he was with nature. I take everything but his lungs. The tree grows around him for weeks before I finally show off the final result, using that plot of land he was so proud of to display him.

Eleven months later, and Darrell Ledgerwood's body was found.

Mr. Ledgerwood is another one of those distasteful gossips, but in this case he tends to spread his frivolous rumours at his church.

I remove his lungs, taking the very breath he needs to speak away, and then I remove his tongue, finding something better for it to do than wag incessantly. I place it carefully in a bible, highlighting a passage. Leviticus 19:16 You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbour: I am the LORD.

The last victim – the one that got Lecter caught – is Jeremy Olmstead.

The pictures he finds aren't quite as good as the others. It's hard to make out the details. Olmstead's body is skewered with dozens of different tools, but Will can't make out what they are.

He squints down at the blurry photographs, but finally gives up and goes to bed.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if these early chapters are a bit slow. The next few are when things really start to take off.

The M'Naghten Rules are used as a basis for being declared not guilty by reason of insanity. This doesn't mean that you get to walk free. In fact, those who are deemed insane, but still considered a potential danger to the public are often locked up for at least twice as long as a sane person who committed a similar crime would be. (If you can't tell, I have a few issues with how the mentally ill are treated by the law.) Either way, it's actually really hard to get declared insane by the courts, even if you already have a diagnosed mental illness. Killing someone because a voice in your head told you to is not a good enough defence unless your illness makes you unable to understand that killing is wrong or your delusions made you believe that you were acting in self-defence, (such as the case where a young man believed that his mother had been replaced by a spy sent to kill him. His schizophrenia wasn't properly diagnosed until after he killed her, even though his family had requested an evaluation earlier that year when he began acting strangely. It's sad to think that the whole tragedy could have been avoided if he'd just gotten the treatment he needed sooner).

The M'Naghten Rules also cover organic issues, such as brain tumours or seizures. Say you're driving and you have a seizure and kill a pedestrian. Now, if you've never had a

seizure before, (or never realized you had had a seizure before, which can be the case with absence seizures) then you're not technically liable for what happened. It was something completely out of your control and there was no way to predict it would happen. You'd lose your license for at least six months, (in Ontario, a person with a seizure disorder can drive as long as they have been seizure-free for six months and are not on medications that impair consciousness), but you wouldn't be guilty of murder. If, however, you were aware of your seizures, refused to take your medications, and had had a seizure within the last six months, but still continued to drive, then you could be found guilty because you made a conscious decision to ignore the law. I have issues with this too, if only because I know that a lot of the side effects of seizure medications can be terrible. Unfortunately, unless better medications are made or new treatments are discovered, there isn't a lot we can do to make things easier for them without compromising the safety of everyone else.

In my uneducated opinion, Hannibal Lecter does not qualify as being insane. He is perfectly aware that the things he does are wrong, but continues to do them anyway. The fact that he was declared insane stinks of some political game, or perhaps Chilton just wanted a chance to study someone like him to make himself famous. The fact that it so clearly backfired on him just proves that he's not capable of being Hannibal Lecter's psychiatrist.

This note went on way too long! If you got through it, thanks!

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Curiosity

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal talk about murder, fans of murderers, and the doctor's mental status.

Chapter Notes

I'm so excited for the next chapter! It's when we start getting into the real plot.

I've done a lot of editing, so this one chapter per day thing will continue, which by my calculations means Philia should be finished by February 23rd. Although, my nephew's birthday is on the 16th, and I'm going to see Bill Engvall perform on the 20th, so...25th at the latest, barring some unexpected incident. I'll try to figure out how to send chapters out automatically if need be. It would be cruel to leave you guys hanging for even a day when you're so close to the end.

Well, enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 3 – Saturday, January 30th, 2016

By the time he gets back to the BSHCI, Lecter's desk and drawings have been returned, but the books have not.

"Dr. Chilton managed to get an article about narcissism published because of me," Lecter explains when Will asks about the improved accommodations after such a short time.

"What, did you give him some insight about himself?" Will quips disparagingly.

Lecter smirks. "Something like that."

He turns back to his drawings, making it clear that he isn't going to engage in conversation until Will thinks of an interesting question.

Will searches his mind for something new, but still can't think of anything that hasn't already been asked. He'd gone over the pages and pages of questions the night before, but quickly realized that Lecter likely had them memorized by now considering all the interviews he'd gone through.

Lecter begins sorting through his mail, ignoring Will.

Giving up for the moment, he pulls out his assignment for Crawford's class, and goes over the pictures and description of Douglas Wilson's murder.

He takes off his glasses.

In his mind, he sees a vision of the man, bound and gagged, struggling against his bindings. He has a mallet in his hand, and swings it, hearing it whistle through the air as he approaches.

One swing to the back of Wilson's head, and he's unconscious. Probably not dead, but in a few minutes it won't matter.

I open the throat from the outside. Three incisions, one to bleed him, second to open the trachea and a third to expose the vocal cords.

He makes the incisions, slicing out a disk of trachea.

I open the throat from inside with the neck of a cello.

He rubs his fingers together, seeing white powder in between them.

It's rosin from a bow.

He raises his head, surveying the empty seats of the theater he stands in.

I wanted to play him. I wanted to create a sound.

He raises the bow to the dead man's open throat.

This sound wasn't for you or from you. It was from me. My sound. I give voice to death.

This is my design.

He opens his eyes, a twisted smile on his face. "Finally managed to get a decent sound out of you," he murmurs darkly to the picture.

"Will?" Lecter questions, startling him out of his reverie.

Will jerks in his seat, looking up at the man in surprise. He fumbles with his glasses, putting them back on nervously. Fear and adrenaline jolt through him, making it difficult to stay still. "Oh, sorry. Got lost for a minute. Did you need something, Dr. Lecter?"

Lecter still has a letter in his hand, but his entire focus is on Will. "Where did you go?"

Will doesn't answer for a moment, and then decides to take advantage of Lecter's curiosity. "I was on a stage, playing a man like a cello." He flips a photograph around to show him Douglas Wilson's corpse.

Lecter steps around his desk and leans in close to the glass. "My, my, *someone* was looking for attention."

Will nods, getting back into the zone. “He doesn’t usually kill like this. His other kills are… private…not for an audience. This is a skilled musician trying out a new instrument.”

Lecter looks amused, and a bit intrigued. “What could’ve brought on such a change of behaviour?”

“Arrogance,” Will replies instantly. “He’s bored with his usual kills. He wants to step up his game. To show the world that he’s capable of so much more.”

“And is he?”

Will scoffs. “No. He left evidence by the truckload. You can’t just open someone up and draw a bow across their innards and expect it to produce a sound. Most people wouldn’t know that. And even if they did, this guy knew exactly how to treat Wilson’s vocal cords so they would toughen up enough to play.” He stares at the picture for a few more seconds before scoffing again. “Somebody in the music business. Most likely one of those pretentious assholes who never made it into an orchestra. Just check out the local music stores, especially those that focus on stringed instruments.”

“You can tell all that from a glance?”

Will shrugs. “It’s obvious to me.”

Lecter tilts his head. “Who do you think he was playing for?”

Will almost says the killer was likely taunting law enforcement when he catches the look in Lecter’s eyes. He closes his mouth and takes another close look at the pictures. “Not the police. Too many little details went into this. He was reaching out with his music. This killer wanted someone in particular to take notice.”

He closes his eyes and goes over the murder once more. “It’s almost like he’s saying, ‘See how well I’m doing?’ Like he’s a little kid trying to get his parents’ attention. He wanted to *impress* them.” He tilts his head. “Another killer?”

“Me, to be specific,” Lecter answers, smiling.

Will looks up at him in surprise.

“I received correspondence from a man named Tobias Budge about a year ago. He owned Chordophone String Shop. The man confessed to me that he often visualized cutting a trombonist’s throat open and playing him like a cello. I told him I would love to see the results. It reminded me of one of my previous works.”

“Benjamin Raspail,” Will states with conviction.

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you report it?” he asks, before realizing what a stupid question it is. “Never mind, I think I know the answer.”

Lecter smiles. “I receive quite a number of disturbing letters. If I reported all of their contents, I’d never be able to read my mail in peace. For example,” He picks up a letter from the table. “This woman, Shara Carlino, writes that she wants to donate her kidney to me, so I can have a decent meal for once.”

“Sounds like an interesting woman,” Will says flatly. “Would you accept it if you were allowed?”

Lecter smiles, eyes brighter than usual. “I generally restrict myself to eating the rude. Distasteful people in life are often quite tasty on a dish. However, I suppose beggars can’t be choosers. If she is healthy, I would probably eat it.”

“You do realize she’s likely mentally ill, right? It’s hybristophilia at the very least.”

“As long as she isn’t on antipsychotics, it wouldn’t affect her taste.”

“If it’s all the same to you, I think I’ll stick to chicken.”

“If you knew what kind of medications are stuffed down *their* gullets, you might reconsider.”

Will laughs. “True. A friend of mine only eats free-range animals. It makes her feel less guilty.”

“I never feel guilty eating anything.”

Will looks away, a little disturbed. “Yeah, guess that’s why they think you’re insane.”

“You disagree?”

“Insane in the legal sense, at least. I talked to a friend of mine about it. You can be mentally ill, but not insane.”

“So you believe I’m mentally ill?”

Will looks him up and down, trying to see through to his mind. “I’m not sure. You don’t show any signs of psychosis, nor any overt signs of delusions. Chilton called you a pure psychopath, but psychopaths aren’t crazy.”

“So you think I’m a psychopath?”

“*Psychopath* is an outdated term for a collection of behaviours resembling antisocial personality disorder. Those with personality disorders aren’t considered insane in the eyes of the law.”

“Your teachers must adore you, Will. You’re such a good study.”

Will flushes, ducking his head. “Not all of them. My Anatomy teacher isn’t exactly fond of me. He loves Bev, though, but that’s because she’s so good in labs.”

“And you’re not?”

“I get distracted. Don’t really enjoy dissecting body parts either.”

“How unfortunate. I always found that very therapeutic.”

Will is silent for a moment, trying not to think too hard about that. “Well…you’re the shrink.”

Lecter smiles. “Indeed. So, you believe I should’ve been diagnosed with a personality disorder then?”

Will’s face scrunches up in thought. “Not…exactly. It would be a lot easier if I knew more about your past.” He looks at Lecter searchingly.

Lecter continues to smile, not saying a word.

Will sighs. “But since that’s not going to happen, I’ll have to puzzle it out for myself.” He closes his eyes, running through what he knows about Lecter in his head.

“You’re not impulsive,” he states. “You can *appear* that way, like with Miggs, but everything you do is meticulously planned out, and you understand the consequences of those actions.”

“What tells you that?”

“Your victims. You waited months – sometimes years after meeting them – before you killed them, just to keep people from connecting their deaths to you. Nobody remembers the guy they spilled a drink on and didn’t apologize to six months ago. You’re rarely outwardly irritable or aggressive. Nobody could remember a time when you even raised your voice in public, let alone had a physical confrontation. You aren’t reckless. You’re not irresponsible either. You never missed an appointment when you were a psychiatrist. You often worked overtime at the hospital. You turned in assignments early when you were studying at Johns Hopkins.”

“Ah, Will, you flatter me.”

“However,” he continues, ignoring that remark. “You definitely show some of the signs. You broke the law, you deceived people, and you’ve never shown any remorse for the people you’ve killed. One could argue that those behaviours are more important than the others in terms of diagnosis.”

“But you don’t,” Lecter states, leaning forward. “You think I’m something else. Dare I say you’ve started to find me interesting?”

Will smiles faintly. “Not yet.”

“I’ll have to try harder to catch you attention.”

“Oh, you have it, don’t worry.” He checks the time and realizes it’s been an hour. He shuffles the papers in his hands, putting them back in order and stuffing them into his book-bag. “I hate to cut this short, but I have homework to do.”

“Are you going to inform Uncle Jack about Tobias Budge?”

“I probably should. What happened to him anyway?”

“Miriam Lass killed him.”

Will’s brow furrows. “The agent who caught you?”

“She wasn’t an agent when she caught me. The *former* Agent Crawford recruited her when she was still in the academy.”

“That…doesn’t sound legal.”

“It wasn’t.”

Will stares at Lecter for a moment, then adjusts his book-bag as he stands up. “Do I remind you of her, Dr. Lecter?”

Lecter smiles, more amused than ever. “I found her to be an intelligent, impressive woman. She has a talent for making great leaps of logic with very little information. It’s how she caught Tobias Budge, and it’s how she caught me. I have a feeling you two would get on quite well. Perhaps in a few years you’ll be able to teach her a thing or two.”

Will senses an insult disguised as a compliment, recognizing the implication that he has nothing to offer her *now*. “Thank you,” he answers flatly. “I’ll see you next week.”

Chapter End Notes

It's nice to put what I learned in Abnormal Psychology to good use. I hope you understood everything. I sometimes ramble when it comes to psychology. Or anything, really.

Hybristophilia is a paraphilia in which sexual arousal, facilitation, and attainment of orgasm are responsive to and contingent upon being with a partner known to have committed an outrage, cheating, lying, known infidelities or crime, such as rape, murder, or armed robbery. You know, the whole Bonnie and Clyde thing. I have no doubt that someone as suave as Hannibal Lecter would receive a lot of fan mail, like with Francis Dolarhyde, and that some of it would be MESSED UP!

I can't quite remember where I got the idea to have a fan want to send Hannibal a kidney. I might have read it somewhere years ago and just forgot about it. Source amnesia. Look it up.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Obsession

Chapter Summary

Will decides to get a three-dimensional look at one of Lecter's victims. Jack Crawford decides Will needs some more information, and calls in an old friend to talk to him about the doctor.

Chapter Notes

Jeez! This chapter is a monster! It's over 4000 words.

I should probably explain something. I've been working on this story since the finale in August. I didn't write it from beginning to end either. I skipped around half a dozen times, trying to figure out the best places to put certain scenes. As such, some chapters have barely more than 1500 words, and a few of them are over 4000. I think the shortest one is the epilogue, but that's a long way off. I've gone through it a few times to make sure everything is consistent, but sometimes things slip by me. I do apologize if you find some glaring mistake that I missed. I'll correct it if you do.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, January 31st – Friday, February 5th

Will hands in his assignment on Monday with a note written to the first page that Lecter mentioned Budge was likely inspired by one of Lecter's earlier victims.

Crawford only has time to arch his eyebrows before Will moves to take his seat as he reads it.

The class is about famous serial killers like Ted Bundy and Jeffrey Dahmer.

Something Ted Bundy said reminds him of Dr. Lecter: "I don't feel guilty for anything. I feel sorry for people who feel guilt." He wonders if Dr. Lecter is capable of pity.

Crawford keeps him behind again.

"How did your last meeting go?"

Will adjusts his glasses, cutting off the man's stare. "I'm still building a rapport, but considering Lecter was willing to give me that information on Tobias Budge makes me think

he's starting to respect me a little."

Crawford nods eagerly, running his thumb over his assignment. It's obvious even this little thing is more than Crawford has ever gotten from the doctor. "What about his past? About what set him off? Have you learned anything about that yet?"

He shakes his head sullenly. "No, sir, but…" He trails off, hesitating. "If I had some better photos of his victims, I could probably tell you a lot more about how he thinks when he's killing."

Crawford nods. "You'll have them by Wednesday. Keep up the good work."

Will realizes he's been dismissed, and leaves to go find Beverly.

Once he gets the pictures, he studies them intently during his lunch break, but still feels like he's struggling to climb up a wall just for a brief glimpse.

He realizes that he needs to get a three-dimensional look at Lecter's victims, and he knows exactly how to do it.

"Dr. Breitkopf?" Will asks after the other students have left. He's probably going to be late for his last class, Sensory Processes, but the professor likes him, so he figures being a few minutes won't matter.

"Yes, Mr. Graham?" the professor answers, packing up his notes for his next lesson.

"I've been thinking about what you said – about learning to concentrate in labs – and I was wondering, would it be possible for me to borrow one of the anatomy dummies tomorrow after class?"

Dr. Breitkopf looks up at him. "And what do you propose to do with it?"

Will shuffles, nervously adjusting his glasses. "Well, see, I've been reading up on exposure therapy, and I figured if I *force* myself to do something that makes me uncomfortable, eventually it'll stop bothering me so much."

Dr. Breitkopf smiles. "That's actually a good idea. A note of warning, though. If I find out you've used it in some *prank,* I will see to it that you're expelled."

Will feels vaguely nauseous, but nods in agreement. "Thank you, sir. I promise I'm just doing this for class." *Just not* your *class.*

"Alright then, you may use one of the older models. Just have it back in two hours, or else." He gives Will a parting smile, and leaves the younger man standing there in shock.

After Anatomy on Thursday, he uses his two free hours to set the stage, using the empty classroom,

Bev offers to stick around, but she has a chemistry class to attend, and Will insists she go.

Putting his glasses away, he lays out the crime scene photos of Jeremy Olmstead's murder, then opens up the toolbox he brought along with him containing every tool used on the man.

He thinks back to his earlier biology classes, remembering where all the major arteries and veins are, and gets to work.

"Jeremy Olmstead is restrained and silenced, but awake. I want him to feel everything."

He has a picture of the Wound Man for a guide, but he has already memorized their placement.

"I start slowly, then build up momentum. It's like keeping time with a metronome." Will smiles. "He struggles, but I don't acknowledge him. I'm too focused on my *work.*"

It's more effort than Will expected to slide the tools into the dummy.

The 'skin' is as pliable as a real human's, but figuring out where to insert the blades makes Will appreciate Lecter's anatomical knowledge all the more.

"Once my vision is complete, I use a knife to remove his heart. He's screaming by now. It's muffled by the gag, but it still…" He closes his eyes, raising the knife above his head. "It sounds like a *symphony,*" he breathes, in ecstasy.

The sound of the doorknob rattling jerks him out of his reverie, and he feels horror well up inside of him.

He shudders, dropping the knife as nausea burns in the back of his throat, and looks up guiltily at the sound of the door swinging open.

Professor Crawford limps into the room. "Will, Ms. Katz said you were–" He freezes in place, mouth dropping open as he catches a glimpse of what exactly Will had been doing.

Without saying a word, he shuts the door behind him and steps forward to survey the situation.

"Okay, explain."

Will gulps, putting his glasses back on in a rush. "I have permission," he blurts out, flushing as soon as the words leave his lips.

He catches sight of the knife on the floor and wonders how quick he'd have to be to slit his wrists before Crawford reached him.

Crawford doesn't say a word, merely stares at him as he fidgets.

"You want me to get inside his head," Will says weakly. He gestures to the mutilated dummy. "I needed to see it in real life."

Crawford doesn't speak for a long moment. "Did it work?"

Will looks at him, surprised. “I think it was starting to. I was just getting to the…organ… removal.” He feels his stomach lurch, and just barely makes it to the garbage pail. He dry heaves over it for a few seconds, feeling tears springing up in his eyes as he tries to settle himself down.

Crawford puts a hand on his shoulder, and Will hates how much that comforts him.

“Alright, not the best idea, but we can work with this. You need real life experience? I know the best person for you to talk to.”

Will looks up, wiping his eyes as subtly as possible. “Sir?”

“I still keep in touch with Miriam Lass. I think she can make some time for you tomorrow. She can tell you everything you need to know about Lecter.”

“You worked the case longer than her,” Will points out, regretting the words as soon as they spring forth.

“I’m too biased,” Crawford admits. “Miriam and Lecter…had a somewhat better relationship. I think she knows him better than anyone.”

Will nods hesitantly. “Thank you, sir.”

Crawford waves him off. “Anything for the job. Now, clean this up, and if Breitkopf asks, you were practising your incision techniques.”

True to his word, Agent Miriam Lass visits Will at school on Friday. They meet up outside Crawford’s classroom.

Bev is obviously curious about her presence, but Will assures her that he’ll tell her later.

“So, you’re Jack’s new project?” is the first thing the agent says upon seeing him.

Will grimaces. “I guess that’s one way of putting it.”

She shrugs and smiles. “It’s fine, kid. I was in your shoes not too long ago. Come on, let’s go get some lunch.”

Will follows her to one of the cafeterias where she orders a cheeseburger and a huge plate of fries.

“Forgot to have breakfast this morning. Or dinner last night. In fact, I probably skipped lunch as well. I’m starved.”

Will nods along, ordering some fries for himself, and follows her as she leads him to a bench outside.

It’s isolated, and a bit chilly, but Agent Lass doesn’t seem to notice.

“What exactly did Professor Crawford tell you to get you to come?” Will asks after a few minutes of silence.

Lass finishes chewing the last bite of her burger, and picks up a fry, looking pensive. “He said you’re the unlucky bastard who picked Hannibal Lecter as your research subject for this term.”

Will highly doubts that Crawford referred to him as an ‘unlucky bastard,’ but he gets what she means. “I didn’t exactly pick him. I was late for class, and he was the only one left.”

“Well, at least you weren’t seeking him out for the glory.”

He hears bitterness in her voice, and can’t help but prod her. “Is that what you were after when you started working with Crawford to find him?”

She glances at him quickly, surprised. “You don’t mince words, do you?”

He shakes his head stubbornly. “Never saw the point.”

She grins. “Me neither. Got me in trouble a lot at school, but I was one of the best, so they put up with me.”

“Same here.”

She laughs, throws her head back and everything, and Will realizes that she’s beautiful. Her long hair ruffles in the wind as a smile stretches across her face.

Once she settles down, she stares at the plate of fries in her lap, searching for words. “I’m not really sure why I agreed to help. Maybe it’s because I was so in awe of Jack. We called him the Guru.” She smiles fondly. “He always got his man.”

“But this time he couldn’t,” Will states. “So he asked for your help.”

She nods. “I had a forensics fellowship, six years of law enforcement, a degree in psychology, and a doctorate in criminology. I was the perfect person to ask.”

“Wow,” Will replies, not even bothering to hide his admiration. “I thought it would be impressive for me to get my Ph.D. before I turn twenty-five, but…wow.”

“Don’t let the highlights fool you, kid. I’m almost forty.”

He double-takes, looking over her face, and seeing the weary lines of age hidden under a light foundation. “Could’ve fooled me. You could probably pass for twenty-nine, easy.”

Lass pats his hand, smiling fondly. “Aw, you’re sweet.”

“I’m usually not.”

They eat in silence for a few moments, before Will gathers up his courage. “How *did* you find him?”

Lass smiles. “Luck, and a bit of detective work. I noticed a scar on Jeremy Olmstead’s leg. It was a shot in the dark, but I figured something that bad resulted in a hospital visit and that maybe…a doctor might remember speaking to him.”

Will blinks. “You thought the accident might have been a failed attempt to murder him?”

Lass shrugs. “I know now that it wasn’t, but it put me on the right trail. I found the attending physician, only he was a psychiatrist by then.”

“Dr. Lecter. He knew you were looking for a surgeon,” Will deduces. “It was part of his camouflage, changing careers like that. It would’ve taken *years* for anyone else to make the connection.”

“Well, luckily I did, and I told Jack, and he drove me to Lecter’s office for an interview. He let me go in alone while he looked for a parking spot, and I spent a few minutes talking with Dr. Lecter. He was charming,” she confesses. “I was pulled in from the moment I laid eyes on him. I practically flirted with him.”

Will frowns at her tone. “What happened?”

Her eyes narrow, turning to stone. “He was going to get some journals for me that hopefully mentioned something about Jeremy Olmstead. I didn’t have much hope by that point, but I thought it was a nice gesture. Then I looked at his desk, and I saw a drawing of the Wound Man. It’s a pretty common picture. You see it in medical journals all the time, but when I looked at it, I saw the scar on his leg, and I knew.”

She pauses, stuffing a fry into her mouth. They’ve gone cold by now, and her face scrunches up in disgust even as she continues chewing.

“He came up behind me – I didn’t even hear him move – and he started choking me. I nearly passed out, and then I heard Jack knock on the door, and I managed to kick a chair over. Jack burst in, and I went limp. Lecter dropped me, and I still didn’t move.

“I was scared, I can admit that. Lecter was *fast.* You have to understand, Jack was built like a boulder, but Lecter was matching him blow for blow. I wasn’t sure if we’d even make it out of that room alive. Then Lecter picked up a scalpel and sliced through Jack’s leg, and he went down.

“I heard Jack *screaming.* Christ, I’d never heard a man make a noise like that. Lecter had his hand around Jack’s neck, and he was just *carving him up.*”

She stopped, bringing a hand to her forehead. “I felt terrible for not acting quickly enough, but I doubt I could have made the shot if Lecter wasn’t so preoccupied. The first one didn’t even graze him, for that matter. The next one got him in the arm, and the remaining four went through his chest before he finally went down.”

“Jack nearly lost his leg. He *did* lose a kidney, and part of his intestines and liver, but the leg was the worst part. Necrosis destroyed one of the muscles, and Jack was barely able to walk for months. He couldn’t do fieldwork anymore, so he got a job as a teacher. I know he hates

it. He'd rather be out there fighting the good fight than stuck in some stuffy classroom. No offence."

"None taken," Will replies. He shifts on the cold bench, trying to get comfortable.

"It wasn't just luck," Will assures her. "You noticed a detail that most people would overlook. And you stopped him. That's pretty awesome in my book."

Lass smiles, pleased yet bitter. "Jack told me he found you in the middle of recreating one of Lecter's kills using an anatomy dummy."

The abrupt change of conversation jars him. "Yeah, I was just trying to understand him better."

She looks at him, and Will finally understands what Crawford saw in her. What *Lecter* sees in her. Her gaze is unflinching, and whatever she finds on his face makes her sigh forlornly. Will's hands itch to put on his glasses, but he stifles the urge, knowing that Agent Lass would recognize what the action meant immediately. He doesn't want her to think he's weak.

"Jack was like that. Still is, to be honest. He'd get so obsessed with things. We all thought he was brilliant, and he is, but the consequences were sometimes more than he could handle."

"It's just a project," he says defensively. "I'm not obsessed."

"Not yet, maybe. I hope you never end up as bad as Jack. It did him no favours." She places her hand on his arm firmly. "I'm not telling you to drop the case. I'm just telling you to be very careful to limit how invested you get. Don't let the search for answers consume you. He's not worth it."

Will wonders how much effort Agent Lass put into figuring out Hannibal Lecter before she realized that, but decides it isn't wise to antagonize her. He might be working for her someday.

"Thank you for speaking with me today, Agent Lass." He holds out his hand, like they're in a business meeting, and she takes it with a smile.

"Good luck on your project, Will, and don't be afraid to drop it if you need to." She hands him a slip of paper with her phone number. "Call me if something important comes up."

After his conversation with Agent Lass, Will heads to Dr. Bloom's office to continue working on his thesis.

"How are things going, Will?"

"Same as always, I suppose," he answers vaguely, going through some journals and jotting down a few notes.

"Are you still meeting with Dr. Lecter tomorrow?"

He looks up for a second, then goes back to his work. "Of course."

She sighs. “I really wish you wouldn’t.”

He looks up at her again, seeing the tension in her shoulders.

“You don’t have to worry about me. I’m perfectly aware of his mind games, and I’m not going to fall for them.”

She gives him a brittle smile. “I thought the same thing too when I first learned about what he was. But Hannibal is always learning new tricks. I think the reason he understands human nature so easily is because he’s always looking from the outside in. Even if his usual methods fail, he’s always searching for a chink in your armour.”

Will slowly sets his thesis notes down. “Professor, is there something you’d like to tell me about him?”

For a second, Will thinks she’s going to start talking, but then she shakes her head. “Not right now, Will. It’s personal.”

He nods. “I understand, but you don’t have to worry. I’m just as good as he is at understanding people.” He smiles crookedly. “Maybe even better.”

Dr. Bloom smiles back, but it fades quickly. “Will, are you sure you’re doing this because you want to?”

He frowns at her, puzzled. “I’m not sure what you mean.”

“Sorry, what I meant was, are you sure Jack’s desires aren’t influencing your choices? With your condition – we still don’t know how much it affects you – how do you know that you want to do this?”

Will bristles, as he always does when someone makes a big deal about the way his mind works. “I *know* I don’t feel the same way about Dr. Lecter than Professor Crawford does. Crawford is contemptuous and wrathful against Lecter. I mostly just find him annoying. There’s a big difference.”

Dr. Bloom sighs. “As long as you’re sure.”

“I am.”

“I just worry about you, Will. I don’t want Hannibal to ruin you like everyone else he touches.”

Will looks away. “I know, and I’m grateful, really, but I’ll be fine.”

After their meeting, he heads to Forensics. Crawford asks for another update on their cases, and Will listens silently for most of the class.

Beverly is noticeably sullen throughout, and doesn’t volunteer to speak.

“Hobbs still hasn’t said a word to me,” Bev says to him after class, clearly frustrated. “Are you sure you can’t just take a look?” she pleads, holding the file out to him.

Will looks around the crowded hallway, and sighs. “Fine, I’ll read it when we get home.”

Bev grins and wraps her arms around him in a tight hug. “You’re a lifesaver! I’m buying pizza tonight.”

“Okay, okay,” Will says, struggling in her grip. “I need to breathe, Bev.”

She lets him go, still grinning. “If you help me pass this class, Graham, I will forever be in your debt.”

“Just don’t forget the pizza.”

Back home, sitting at the kitchen table with a slice of meatlovers in his hand – probably not the kind of toppings most people would eat under the circumstances – Will carefully reads over the report of Garret Jacob Hobbs’s murders.

There are pictures of all the victims, as well as some crime scene photos of Hobbs’s patio and kitchen displaying the blood splatter of Hobbs’s wife and child.

Only four of Hobbs’s victims were ever recovered, though several pillows were found stuffed with the other girls’ hair.

A family photo is included, and Will is struck by how much Hobbs’s daughter, Abigail, looks like the girls he murdered.

Crime scene photos of Elise Nichols and Cassie Boyle are there too, and these are what he needs.

Will shuts his eyes, picturing Elise Nichols’ bedroom.

I know she’s alone. I’ve been waiting for her.

I see her laid out on her bed, so peaceful. I don’t want her to suffer. I lunge, wrapping my hands around her throat. She chokes and gasps, but I continue squeezing until her heartbeat stops.

He looks at the pictures of Hobbs’s cabin, the antlers mounted on the wall next to a metal table, the tools laid out for him. He builds a three dimensional space in his mind.

I take her with me back to my workspace. Impale her lifeless body on the antlers to drain her blood. Then I set to work cutting her open.

It’s meticulous, but gentle. Not like Dr. Lecter.

He shakes his head. Focus!

I remove the liver, but something is wrong. There are strange bumps on the outside, and as I push down, I feel more within, hard and unyielding. The meat is no good.

Guilt grips him, making his stomach churn uncomfortably.

"Why would he feel guilty now?" he whispers to himself.

In his mind, he steps back from the table and looks around. Everything in the room has been made with his own two hands. He never wastes anything.

My hands shake as I put her back together as best I can. I use antler velvet to try to heal the wounds on her torso. I take her back to her home and put her to bed. This is all I can do for her.

Will opens his eyes, confused. There's no evidence that Hobbs was losing his meticulous nature. Even weighed down by guilt, the man had been careful enough to patch her up and slip her back into bed, all without alerting anyone in the house. Those aren't the actions of a man having a breakdown.

He looks down at the family picture, and sees how Hobbs's hand rests on his daughter's shoulder. There is so much *love* on his face. The mother looks like an extra in a movie, out of place and unimportant. The daughter…

Will leaves that thought for later, moving on to the picture of Cassie Boyle, mounted on a stag's antlers in the middle of a field.

Immediately, he knows something is wrong.

I have been watching her for a long time, learning her habits. She is so easy to subdue. I strap her to a table and wait for her to wake up.

No, no, this isn't right! Hobbs didn't want his victims to suffer! Why would he do this?

She wakes up, so confused. I touch her face clinically, giving her false comfort. I must be quick and efficient during the removal process. She'll barely have time to scream.

He pushes the photo away, his hands trembling with adrenaline.

Blindly, he picks up the family photo once more, taken just a few weeks before Hobbs started killing, and he focuses on Abigail.

I love her so much I can't stand the thought of her leaving I won't let her I won't.

Hobbs killed her quickly. She didn't suffer for more than a minute. He was *merciful.* Whoever killed Cassie Boyle was *not.*

Abigail is looking up at her father, his love reflected in her eyes, but as Will looks deeper, he sees something else.

She's afraid of him.

She knew.

Will shuts his eyes.

I love you I love you please don't hurt me daddy I'll do whatever you say if you don't hurt me.

"Well?" Bev asks, bringing him out of his reverie. She's leaning over the table, munching on a strip of garlic bread.

He puts the photo down and clasps his hands together on the table. "During your next meeting, ask Hobbs how he thinks his daughter felt when he made her lure his victims for him."

Bev's mouth drops open. "Dude! Are you serious?" She reaches out for the photographs – placing the half-eaten garlic bread on the table – and begins sifting through them one by one. "Okay, explain this to me."

Will sighs, sitting back. "Hobbs loved his daughter. He loved her so much that the thought of her leaving home was *agonizing.* He wanted to keep her forever, but he couldn't. He knew that, so he found a different way to bind her to him.

He rubs at his eyes. "He made her pick the girls he killed. She'd befriend them, find out when they'd be alone, and he'd kill them."

"Wait! So she knew? Why didn't she say something?" Bev asks, still wide-eyed.

Will doesn't even have to think about it. "Because she loved him too much."

She looked back down at the pictures. "That's so messed up."

"That's love."

"Pretty messed up concept of love if you ask me."

"I agree."

"And the cannibalism thing? What was *that* all about?"

Will smiles wryly. "He felt his love was all-consuming, so he decided consuming someone else would work."

"Work?"

Will's smile fades. "He didn't want to hurt her. It was never about making her suffer. He just wanted to keep her with him. Since he knew he couldn't, he found substitutes. I guess he thought that if he ate them, they would be a part of him forever."

"At least until he had to use the bathroom," she quips.

Will smiles briefly.

“You get anything else?”

Will debates whether or not to tell her his suspicions, but decides against it.

He sees no reason to make his friend worry over a hunch that may very well be wrong.

Still, looking down at Cassie Boyle’s body, splayed out so *artistically,* he knows of only one person who could be responsible for this.

Chapter End Notes

Do you see why I was excited for this chapter? This is where things start to get interesting.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Accusations

Chapter Summary

Will confronts Hannibal about his suspicions.

Chapter Notes

I think this chapter might be one of my favourites. I had a lot of fun writing it. *Giggling* You'll see why.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 4 – Saturday, February 6th, 2016

When Will arrives for their fourth meeting, he finds Lecter doing push ups on the floor, the top half of his jumpsuit tied around his waist.

Immediately, Will notices the scars – bullet wounds.

There's one on his right arm, just below his shoulder, clearly a grazing wound. The other four litter his torso, two close together on his left side over his ribs, one on the right, and the final one just an inch below his right nipple.

Just from looking at the wound pattern, he can visualize Miriam Lass's desperation to take him down, aiming for his center of mass, but trembling too much to make a clean shot.

Lecter catches him staring, and arches an eyebrow, smirking.

Will flushes, looking away. He desperately wants to put on his glasses, but refrains from doing so. He can't afford any barriers today. "Sorry to interrupt. Do you need a minute?"

Lecter gets to his feet, movements smooth like a dancer. He doesn't bother to put the top half of his jumpsuit back on, instead folding his hands behind his back and standing military straight, seemingly unaware of his partial nudity.

"Not at all, Will. I was looking forward to your visit. Have you decided what questions you wish to ask me?"

Will makes brief eye contact with the man, then looks away again, still blushing. “Would you mind putting your top back on, please?” he blurts out.

Lecter smirks. “Why, Will? Are you feeling exposed?” he teases, making no move to acquiesce.

“Your scars are distracting,” Will explains, biting his lip as his eyes dart back to the man’s bare chest.

He’s always been peripherally aware that Lecter is attractive – something the older man has likely used to his advantage on more than one occasion – but seeing him on display like this is flustering.

His muscles are thick and well-defined, likely from spending hours exercising to pass the time. His chest hair is dark and curly, streaked with gray, but his back looks almost hairless.

And *goddamnit!* Will did not come here to ogle the cannibalistic serial killer!

He pushes down his embarrassment and faces Lecter head on. “Why did you kill Cassie Boyle and let Garret Jacob Hobbs take the blame?”

Lecter doesn’t respond immediately, aside from a slight widening of his eyes and a twitch of his lips.

“What brought this on, Will?”

Will opens his bag and pulls out the pictures of Elise Nichols and Cassie Boyle’s bodies he’d copied from Beverly’s notes, holding them up for Lecter to see.

“I studied these for hours last night. You can’t convince me that these two murders were done by the same person.”

Lecter looks between the two pictures, not reacting visibly to them. “Maybe so, but what makes you think I had anything to do with it?”

“Oh, give me a break!” He strides up to the glass, pressing the pictures flat against it. He’s breaking one of Chilton’s rules, but he couldn’t care less at the moment. “Elise Nichols. Bruising on her neck proves she was strangled. She died within minutes. It was quick – *merciful* even. When Hobbs discovered she had cancer, he sewed her back up, tried to fix that damage he’d done, and tucked her into bed. He *loved* her. He couldn’t stand the thought of *wasting* her. The FBI speculated that this caused him to devolve, but that isn’t the case. Hobbs wasn’t like that in the end. He already had his endgame planned out. He killed his wife and slit his daughter’s throat before the FBI even arrived on his doorstep. They checked his phone records and found that someone had called him only minutes before the FBI arrived to question him. Somebody warned him.

“Cassie Boyle. Autopsy revealed her lungs were removed from her chest *while she was still alive!* Her body was posed out in the open on a pair of antlers. It was…*field kabuki!* That isn’t what Hobbs would’ve done. He would’ve honoured every part of her, not leave her out

in the sun for the birds to pick at! These are two different kills with two completely different motives. One was to honour, the other was to torture and humiliate."

Lecter stares at him indifferently. "You make a good point, but what makes you think that *I'm* responsible for Ms. Boyle's death?"

The things that have been bothering him since he first recreated her death – using both the pictures and details from her autopsy – finally make sense, and he begins speaking slowly. "Her cortisol levels weren't elevated. Not much, anyway. Stress hormones can ruin the *taste.* You kept her calm for as long as you could, then you cut her chest open and ripped her lungs out while she was still breathing."

He takes a breath. "You would've touched her face, brushed her hair back, maybe even told her you were a doctor so she'd feel safer. By the time you started *cutting her*..." He squeezes his eyes shut. "I *know* you killed her. I got the same feelings when I pictured you killing your other victims. Your methods might have varied, but the essence of your kills is always the same."

Will opens his eyes to find Lecter just inches away from his face, startling him into taking a step back.

He makes eye contact for a brief second, and gets a rush of *fascination* from the older man.

"You really are something special, Will."

The younger man feels a surge of triumph. "So I'm right. I don't suppose you'd be willing to tell me why you chose this girl?"

"She was on my list, but she was far from the only one."

Will freezes, feeling his stomach clench. "What?"

Lecter turns around and walks over to his desk. He sits down and folds his hands over his drawings. "Ms. Boyle was hardly the first victim I hid in plain sight. I do wonder if you'll be able to find them all."

Will swallows, throat clicking. "How many people have you killed?"

"I look forward to hearing your estimate, dear Will. Is there anything else?" Lecter asks, implying that he is done with the former topic.

Will grits his teeth. "How did you know to warn Hobbs?"

Lecter smiles. "Freddie Lounds – a journalist from the website, Tattle Crime – is quite proficient at getting details for her stories. She had a few insiders on the Hobbs case, and they told her about the antlers and the pipe thread. I made the connection, obtained Mr. Hobbs's phone number, and the rest is history." He sounds very satisfied.

Will bristles. "You know, an innocent woman died because of that phone call."

“I believe Hobbs killed *two* people that day, Will,” he corrects smugly.

“Abigail Hobbs wasn’t *innocent.* Not entirely. She helped pick the girls her father killed.”

Lecter’s eyes brighten, but he puts on a forlorn expression. “Oh, dear. What would make a sweet little girl like her do that?”

“Threats, covert incest, captor bonding? Take your pick. Hobbs had a lot of control over his daughter. He knew how to get her to do what he wanted, and Abigail had enough self-preservation to go along with it. She was probably hoping he’d stop after she left.”

“Would he have?”

The answer is obvious to him. “No.”

Will rubs his face, the stress of the day catching up with him

“I can understand threats, but *covert incest? Captor bonding?* What brings those thoughts to your mind?”

Will frowns. “Maybe covert incest isn’t the right term. Emotional abuse, perhaps? I can’t think of any other description for a father forcing his teenage daughter to pick a surrogate of herself to avoid being murdered and eaten by him. Captor bonding should be obvious.”

“A strange way to describe the relationship between father and daughter.”

Will shakes his head vehemently. “*This father* wasn’t acting like one. He had to maintain ownership over his daughter by any means necessary. He loved her, but it was a selfish love. A lot of messed up parent-child relationships are like that. You’re biologically programmed to love your parents, no matter how much they hurt you. It’s how you survive.”

“Speaking from experience, Will?”

Will smiles bitterly. “My father was a good man who loved me with all his heart. My mother…she tried. That’s all I’ll say about her.”

“*Was?*” Lecter repeats silkily.

Will stiffens, realizing his mistake, and folds his arms across his chest. “He died last summer.”

“How unfortunate. Was it the drinking?”

That makes him grind his teeth. “He only drank when he was out of work. He’d been sober for years.”

Lecter continues to stare at him, prompting him to keep going.

He scowls. “If you must know, it was a brain aneurysm. He died in his sleep. It was quick, at least.”

“Quick or not, you have my sympathies. It’s very difficult to lose a parent at such a young age.”

Will checks his expression, finding only sincerity. “Huh, you actually mean that.”

Lecter’s eyes flash with interest. “Am I really so transparent to you, Will?”

“You’re more difficult to read than most, I’ll give you that. Suppose that’s the whole *shallowness of affect* thing.”

“I *do* feel emotions, Will. I just don’t feel the need to broadcast them to everyone.”

“Yeah, not to mention it allows you to hide you true intentions.”

“Guilty as charged,” he answers glibly.

Will checks his watch nervously, noting that it’s not quite time for him to leave.

“I’m curious, Will,” Lecter begins. “When did you first realize you were different?”

Will looks at him. “If I tell you, what’s in it for me?”

“I may be far less taciturn during our next appointment if you do.”

Will ponders this for a moment, before deciding it’s worth it to get some answers.

He takes a seat, wanting to get a bit comfortable before launching into his story. “I always knew there was something different about me, but it’s not like I had a name for it. I just always seemed to know what other people were feeling. I was just…you know…sensitive. Dr. Bloom was the one who told me what it meant. I took her cognition class last year. We were talking about grief, and how it affects the way we function, and she showed us a video of a woman discussing her son’s death, and her younger son’s illness, during a session with her. She had permission from the woman, of course, so she didn’t have her face blurred out or anything. Just her name was withheld.” He shifts in his seat, crossing his legs. “While she was talking, I kept noticing these…micro-expressions, I think is the term. It bothered me. I know that stuff isn’t always accurate, but I just had a gut feeling that something wasn’t adding up. She talked about how her husband had left her, and then her oldest son starting feeling sick a few months later. Doctors diagnosed both of her children with an unknown genetic disease when the younger boy started showing the same symptoms a year later.

“It wasn’t just the expressions either. It was the way she talked about it. You’d expect a mother to care more about how her children were suffering, but it seemed like it was all about her. How *she* had to stay up all night with them, checking their breathing. How *she* had to feed them and dress them because they didn’t have the energy to move. How her ex never bothered to help her. I know taking care of a sick family member can take its toll, but it just didn’t…seem right.”

Lecter glances up at the ceiling for a moment, nodding to himself. “I think I understand. She was poisoning them. Munchausen by proxy?”

“Not exactly,” Will tells him. “Her end goal was to kill both of her children to punish her husband for leaving her. She felt like, since they were *her* children, she could do whatever she wanted to them. She was just a narcissist with a grudge.” He shrugs. “I told Dr. Bloom about my suspicions, and she made a few calls. The younger boy was still alive, but he was in bad shape. They did some more testing at the hospital, and *finally* figured out what she was using to poison them. It was a performance-enhancement drug athletes used in training to reduce the oxygen levels. It’s supposed to make their bodies compensate by creating more red blood cells. It’s banned, of course. That’s why it was designed so regular blood and urine tests couldn’t detect it. Last I heard, the woman is still awaiting trial. I don’t know what happened with the boy.”

“And this led to Dr. Bloom diagnosing you with an empathy disorder, because you were able to see what she could not.”

“Basically, yeah. I mean, she had to slow down and zoom in to see the expressions on the video that I noticed right away. I guess I’m just good at reading people.”

“That’s clearly not all you’re good at. You can look at a picture of a crime scene and recreate it step by step. That kind of thing rarely comes naturally. It usually requires years of training and experience.”

Will shrugs. “That’s probably why Crawford wants me to apply for the FBI. He thinks I’d make a good profiler.”

“You don’t agree?”

“I’d rather keep my options open. It’s not exactly *fun* to think like a killer.”

Lecter smiles. “Perhaps you just need the right inspiration.”

Will tenses, looking away. “I…I need to go. Goodbye, Dr. Lecter.”

“Goodnight, Will. Sweet dreams.”

Will barely contains a snort as he leaves.

Gideon is asleep in his cell, so Will passes by without stopping.

The temperamental orderly is there to lead him out.

They’ve been walking for only a minute when the orderly blurts out, “Why do you keep coming back?”

Will looks at him, surprised. “What do you mean?”

“Lecter’s not going to give you anything. He’s toying with you. If you want some advice, get out before he decides to get rid of you.”

It’s obvious that the man has some serious issues with Lecter, but Will doesn’t want to delve into them too deeply right now. “He might have other victims we don’t know about. Their

families deserve to know what happened to them."

He scoffs. "You think it'll give anyone comfort to know that someone they love was cut open while they were still alive and served as the main course at one of his dinner parties?"

Will shies away, a little frightened by his vehemence.

"Hey, Murray, don't scare the kid. He's just doing this for school," another orderly says as he approaches them. Will recognizes him as the one who was checking him out a few weeks ago. He gets the sense that the man is trying to impress him.

The dark-haired orderly holds out a hand. "I'm Matthew Brown. Don't mind Kyle. Lecter rubs him the wrong way. Can't say I blame him. The guy's messed up."

Will almost asks if he means Lecter or Murray, but bites his tongue and takes his hand instead. "Will Graham."

Matthew brings his hand up to his mouth and kisses it, leaving Will gaping in astonishment.

He pulls his hand back quickly, barely refraining from wiping it off on his jeans.

Murray snorts and walks back down the hall, leaving them alone.

"So, you doing anything later? I work nights most of the time, but I could meet you for coffee in the morning." Brown is practically leering.

Will gives him a thin-lipped smile. "I'm flattered, but I'm pretty swamped for the next few weeks. Last semester before graduation. I've got to do homework for my homework."

Matthew grins, not at all deterred. "No sweat. At least we can talk when you come to visit Lecter." His voice changes slightly as he says his name, and Will deciphers it as jealousy.

"Sounds like a date," Will quips, wanting to get as far away as possible.

Matthew nods enthusiastically and wishes him goodnight.

Chapter End Notes

Muffling laughter behind my hands Yes, Hannibal *was* half-naked for this entire chapter. Why do you ask?

In all seriousness, though, I wanted to talk briefly about Abigail Hobbs.

When I was a teenager, I read a lot of books about abuse. (Don't worry, my parents were wonderful to me. I was honestly just curious after reading some stories where children were abused.) One thing that I've never been able to forget is this: When children accuse

a parent of harming them, they soon become aware that they have the ability to rip their family apart, and as bad as the abuse is, this can be far more terrifying.

Now, that was written a few decades ago, when child abuse wasn't something people talked about as openly as we do today. It was one explanation for why so many children recanted their statements of abuse. Sometimes their other family members would guilt them into it. If the abusive parent (most likely the father or step-father) was the sole provider, then the threat of poverty could be used to keep them quiet. (Yes, sometimes daddy loses his temper and hits you, but at least there's food on the table!) It's a lot of pressure to put on a child. That's why I completely understand why Abigail never told anyone about what her father was doing. He abused her psychologically, scared her into believing if she didn't help him he would kill her, and he very well nearly followed through in the show. This wasn't some idle threat, and she knew it.

That's part of the reason I didn't like Jack Crawford. I still don't to be honest. He treated Abigail like a criminal instead of realizing that she was just as much a victim as those other girls. I mean, what was she supposed to do? Tell a teacher that she thought her dad was killing girls and eating them? Does that sound like something you could really believe, or would you think she was making things up or going crazy? Hell, sexually abused children went unheard for decades because psychologists were convinced they were just fantasizing about having sex with their parents!

What if she had told the police? Would they have believed her? What if they didn't, and then called her father to take her home? How terrified would you be if you were forced to go home with a murderer who knew you'd betrayed them?

The thing is, Abigail was just a scared teenage girl who loved her father. I've thought about it, and I don't know what I would have done differently if I was in her shoes. If my mother had started killing people and I found out, I don't think I could have turned her in. Could you?

I don't think I'll ever *like* Abigail, but I understand her too much to hate her. I know she did bad things, but I think it's pretty obvious that she never wanted to hurt anyone. She just wanted a safe home with a loving family.

And that wasn't brief at all, but I hope I got my point across. There are just so many interesting characters in this show. I'd love to analyze them all.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Agitation

Chapter Summary

> Will searches for other murders that could be connected to Dr. Lecter, and struggles to deal with the emotional fallout.

Chapter Notes

> I lied, I think the *next* chapter is my favourite. I should stop teasing you guys like this, but the more I read through, the more I remember how much fun I had writing them.
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, February 7th – Friday, February 12th

Will is alone, the scent of pine and rotting leaves in his nostrils. Trees rise up around him like idols for an ancient god. He can hear something behind him, feel it looming there. He hears a snuffling noise, like a large animal breathing. He's frozen, unable to even turn his head.

Suddenly, he feels a terrible pain in his chest, and he looks down in horror as antlers, black as night, pierce through him. He reaches up with blood-drenched hands to grab them–

And then he wakes up gasping, clutching at his chest in fear.

After a few moments of examining his torso, he settles down. He spends Sunday doing homework and researching murders that took place while Lecter was still actively killing.

Each time he finds a picture of a crime scene, he lets the mindset of the killer wash over him, hoping to catch a glimpse of Lecter's MO.

By the time he goes to bed, he's mentally exhausted. A foreign sense of bloodlust fills him, making him twitch his fingers as if grasping for a knife.

He doesn't sleep well that night either.

The next day, Will catches up with Beverly in the hallway before class starts.

"How did your interview go yesterday?" he asks, adjusting his book-bag on his shoulder.

Beverly grins at him, practically bouncing. “Finally got a reaction. Once he started talking about his daughter, it’s like he couldn’t stop. I think I might be able to finish my report after all.”

“Did he say anything about Cassie Boyle?”

She frowns, walking more sedately. “He denied any involvement. Think he had, like, a psychotic break or something and can’t remember it?”

Will shakes his head. “I don’t think so. Dr. Lecter told me that *he* killed her.”

Beverly stops in the middle of the hallway. “Okay, what?” She pulls him to the side, nearly slamming him against the wall in her haste. “Where did *that* come from?” she hisses.

Will looks down guiltily. “I kind of…figured it out last week, and I asked him about it. Demanded, really. He told me that he killed Cassie Boyle, *and* that he’s the one who called Hobbs to warn him that the FBI were on to him.”

“How would *he* know that?”

“Tattle Crime. I checked the website. Lounds released vital information about Elise Nichols just a few hours before Hobbs killed his wife and daughter.”

“But why? Why call? Why kill somebody else and pin it on Hobbs?”

Will looks off to the side, contemplative. “Maybe…he just wanted to see what would happen.”

Bev shudders. “Are you going to tell Professor Crawford?”

He shrugs.

“*Will,*” she scolds. “You can’t keep this hidden. Crawford needs to know.”

“And I’ll tell him as soon as I get some concrete evidence. Right now, I’m just going with my gut.”

“Your *gut* is usually right.”

“I know, but this is important. Besides, Lecter told me that he’s killed others. I know him. I know how he kills. I can find them.” Will looks at her imploringly. “Just give me some time. I don’t want to go running to Crawford before I have all the information.”

Beverly glares at him. “You have until Friday, or I’m telling him myself.”

Will grins at her. “You’re the best, Bev.”

He throws himself back into his research, looking for other murders that give him the same feeling Cassie Boyle did.

He finds one, or more accurately, he finds thirty-five.

The victims of Lawrence Wells were staged in a totem pole on the beach when he was seventy years old.

Wells is seventy-six now, and reluctant to talk about his work once he learned that his own unknown son was his last victim.

Another student, an older man named Paul Krendler is the one interviewing him.

Will approaches him cautiously, knowing Krendler's reputation as an arrogant bastard. He used to be a cop, and tends to use that as a reason to ignore Crawford's lectures. He only shows up because he wants to get into the FBI. The fact that Will so easily surpasses him in class hasn't exactly made their relationship a friendly one.

"Hey, Krendler, can I talk to you for a minute?"

It's just before their final class on Friday. Will's deadline is almost up.

Krendler looks up from his phone, and gives Will a disgusted look. He's generically handsome, with dark hair and pale eyes. If he wasn't such a jerk, he'd probably be very popular with the female students.

"What do you want, Graham? It's a little late to trade subjects," he sneers.

Will doesn't react. "I'm quite happy with my subject, thank you. I was a little curious about yours, though. How have your interviews been going?"

Krendler glares, shoving his phone into his pocket aggressively. "Are you doing that freaky psychic shit? Because if you are, then knock it off!" He's practically looming over Will, trying so hard to be intimidating.

Will bristles. "I just wanted to tell you that the best way to get a reaction out of Wells is to ask if someone else gave him the idea to put his mistress' son on the top of his totem pole."

Krendler scoffs, turning away. "Yeah, whatever. I don't need your help."

Will glares at his retreating figure, supressing the urge to bash the man's head against the wall.

He heads for class, grinding his teeth and setting his books down with more force than necessary.

"Jeez, Graham, what's got you in a huff?" Bev asks, twirling a strand of her hair around a pen.

"Paul Krendler."

"Is he being a dick? Do you want me to go beat him up for you?"

Will smiles unwillingly. “No.”

“Seriously? I’ll do it. I’ll do it even if he *didn’t* piss you off. He’s a misogynistic dickwad.”

“I’m sure he’ll get what’s coming to him eventually,” Will mutters.

Class starts, but Will finds himself getting more and more agitated. He spies Krendler pointing him out to a fellow student and snickering out of the corner of his eye.

He takes a deep breath and refocuses on Crawford’s lecture.

“What do these victims have in common?” Crawford asks, showing a screen of forty-eight pictures of people on the projector. “Look at them, and tell me what you see.” He passes out copies of the pictures, and the students try to decipher their meaning. There’s a lot of whispering and shuffling of papers, but Will simply stares. He already knows the answer.

Bev puts up her hand. “They’re completely random. They’re different races, different genders, different ages. They have different professions, and come from different backgrounds.”

Crawford gives her a strained smile, but shakes his head. “Not quite what I was hoping for, but a good enough analysis. Will?”

Will looks down at the pictures in front of him, setting his glasses down, and begins sorting them until they’re arranged from darkest to lightest skin-tone.

“It’s a colour palette.”

Crawford smiles, pleased. “Perfect.” He changes the slide to the next picture, showing the result – an enormous eye. “This is the work of a killer we call The Muralist. As you can see…” He gives the students a stern look when he hears scattered laughter. “His design took quite a bit of effort. Once he had his chosen victim, he killed them with a heroin overdose, then injected them will silicone and painted their bodies with resin to preserve them. He was never caught.”

This last part makes the humour drop from the students’ faces, but Will is too preoccupied with studying the eye.

He’s had so much practice slipping into killers’ minds over the past few weeks that gaining an understanding of this Muralist is easy. He saw the beauty in every shade of skin, and wanted to combine them into something greater than the sum of their parts. Synergy.

But, there’s something wrong…

Crawford brings up another slide, showing a black man named Roland Umber. “This man was our lead. We found his body downstream from the silo where the others were located. He was a recovering heroin addict who didn’t succumb to an overdose like The Muralist’s other victims. Autopsy showed that he ripped himself out of the mural and ran off a cliff. We don’t know if it was an accident, or if he was running from The Muralist and decided to take his chances in the river.

“I’ve kept up on this case for seven years, but The Muralist has never resurfaced. Apparently, once his work was done, he hasn’t decided to kill this way again.”

“That *isn’t* his design.”

Crawford looks at Will, surprised by the interruption. “I’m sorry?”

“That *isn’t* his design," he repeats. "The white man in the center of the eye, he’s all wrong.” Will glares at the image, feeling the urge to bang his fist against the table. He gestures towards the screen instead. “Just look at it! Roland Umber, *he* was perfect. The new guy, he doesn’t *fit!*” Will stands up, walking over to the projector. “His leg was amputated.”

Crawford studies the image with slow understanding. “We assumed it was removed to make him fit better.”

Will shakes his head. “He wouldn’t do that. If any piece didn’t fit, he’d find a new one, or he’d start all over. No.” He pauses. “I think I know exactly who killed these people.” He points to the white man in the center. “That’s your murderer.”

Krendler scoffs loudly. “You think the guy cut off his own leg and sewed himself to those other bodies? You’re losing your touch, Graham.”

Will gives him a look of such loathing that Krendler shrinks back. “No, I’m saying that *someone else* convinced him that becoming a part of his own design was the only way to make it perfect.”

Crawford stares at him. “Then why take the leg?”

Will turns back to the screen, frowning. “Maybe he was hungry,” he quips.

With that, Crawford finally catches on to who Will is referring to. “You think *Hannibal Lecter* did this?” His voice is low, but still carries far enough that the students hear. They seem shocked by the idea.

Will nods. “I think Lecter would’ve *loved* this. He might have even seen it as helping out a fellow artist.”

Crawford looks up at the projection again. “He’s certainly capable of that,” he muses softly.

Class ends, and the other students reluctantly pile out, talking amongst themselves in hushed voices and giving Will fleeting glances as they leave.

“Stay behind, Will.”

Bev slows down, giving him a firm look. *Are you going to tell him?* she mouths.

Will nods, gesturing to her that she should go on ahead.

She rolls her eyes, flouncing out of the room.

Will knows he'll have some explaining to do when he gets home.

"Alright, talk. What's going on with Lecter?"

Will briefly makes eye contact, then looks away from Crawford's intense gaze. "I was planning on telling you once I was sure…"

Crawford's eyes narrow. "And what are you not sure about?"

"Cassie Boyle. I don't think Garret Jacob Hobbs killed her. And I don't think Lawrence Wells came up with the idea to put his victims on display like that."

Crawford just stares at him. "What are you saying, Will?"

He grimaces. "I think Lecter is responsible for a lot more murders than the ones he was convicted for, either by copying other murderers or by proxy."

"And you know this, how?"

Will glances up briefly. "He told me."

Crawford glares. "And you're just telling me this now?"

"I wasn't sure if he was lying," he says defensively.

"And is he?"

"…No."

Crawford slams his fist down on his desk, startling Will into stepping back.

"What else are you withholding, Graham?"

"Nothing, sir," Will insists, shrinking away.

Crawford looks angry enough to hit him.

"I'm coming to your next meeting with Lecter. We'll get to the bottom of this. And if you hide something like this again, I'm taking you off the case, and giving you a zero."

Will opens his mouth to protest, but is cut off.

"I'll be coming along too," Dr. Bloom says, startling them both as she appears in the doorway. She walks into the room and stands beside Will, putting a hand on his shoulder.

"This doesn't concern you, Alana," Crawford tells her.

"Will is most certainly my concern," she retorts. "If he's right – and I think we both know that he is – then Dr. Lecter has a reason for revealing that information after so many years. I'd like to know what it is."

“And I can’t talk you out of it,” Crawford sighs, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Just like old times.”

They both turn to look at their student. “It’s really for the best, Will. We don’t know if Dr. Lecter is playing some sort of game,” Dr. Bloom says, trying to pacify him.

“He’s always playing games,” Will tells them. “But if it’ll make you feel better, I guess you should come.”

Chapter End Notes

Will needs a nap. He's so grumpy in this chapter.

I can't wait until the next one. We get to see some interesting new interactions between Hannibal and Will's professors.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Interrogation

Chapter Summary

> Will and his professors go to the BSHCI to question Lecter about his connection to other murderers and their victims.

Chapter Notes

> I loved writing this chapter so much! Will is just the sassiest little muffin in this. Some of the lines still make me laugh.
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 5 – Saturday, February 13th, 2016

"I just don't see why you're taking this so seriously. It's obvious Lecter is toying with him, and he fell for it like all the others," Chilton insists, rolling his eyes at the group gathered in his office.

"Believe me, Dr. Chilton, Will Graham is a very perceptive young man. If he thinks Lecter killed more people, then he's probably right," Crawford says.

"It's not unlikely that Lecter has a higher body count given his psychopathy, but to assume that a mere *student* can figure out who these mysterious victims are? It's almost inconceivable. I cannot allow you to talk to him unsupervised. Who knows what kind of things you could implant into his head?"

"So, we can't assist Will in interviewing Dr. Lecter?" Dr. Bloom asks.

"I didn't say that," Chilton clarifies. "I simply meant that I'll be in attendance as well, to keep things above board, so to speak."

Will gives up all hope of this being a successful endeavour, and takes off his glasses only long enough to rub his eyes before replacing them. He needs all the barriers he can get at this point.

Barney escorts them to the hallway to Lecter's cell.

“There’s only one chair out. I’ll grab a few more,” Barney says at the gate, turning around and leaving them on the other side.

“Thanks, Barney,” Will says.

“Well, hello, Dr. Bloom,” Gideon greets with a smile, which she returns reluctantly.

“Hello, Dr. Gideon.”

“Got the whole gang together, eh? Who’s in trouble?”

“Nobody,” Dr. Bloom reassures him. “We’re just trying to clear something up with Dr. Lecter.”

“Young Mr. Graham believes the FBI missed a number of Dr. Lecter’s victims,” Chilton elaborates mockingly, never one to pass up the chance to embarrass someone.

“That hasn’t been confirmed yet,” Dr. Bloom interjects. “We should at least hear Dr. Lecter’s side before we start crucifying him over a hunch.”

Will feels a bit wounded that she doesn’t believe in his idea, but restrains himself from snapping at her.

Gideon grins menacingly at the administrator. “Oh, from what I’ve seen of young Mr. Graham’s talents, there’s no doubt in my mind that he’s right. I caught a bit of what he and Lecter were talking about last week. It was *oh so* fascinating.” He grins up at Will, flashing his shining eyes at him. “Come chat with me when you’re done, if you feel like it, Mr. Graham. I could use some intelligent conversation once in a while.”

Chilton looks insulted, and struts off in a huff, followed by Crawford and Dr. Bloom.

Will gives Gideon a pained smile, and reluctantly follows after the others.

Lecter appears mostly amused by the chorus of people at his cell, setting his pencil down and giving them his full attention.

“Well, this is an unusual turn of events. Good evening, Dr. Bloom. It’s been a while since we’ve spoken. How *are* your wife and son?”

Dr. Bloom’s expression tightens. “They’re doing quite well, Dr. Lecter. Thank you for asking.”

“Am I to assume that *you* are the generous donor funding the construction of my new cage?” Lecter asks slyly.

Dr. Bloom looks guilty for a moment, and then stands up straighter to look him in the eye. “Considering what happened to Ivo Miggs a few weeks ago, I felt it would be better for you and the other patients if your interactions were more limited. I can assure you that you can have your pick of orderlies for company. Mr. Matthews has already agreed to supervise you. The other three positions have yet to be filled.”

“Thank you for your consideration, Alana.”

Will watches the exchange, taking in the information they aren’t saying out loud.

He notices a faintly fearful expression on Dr. Bloom’s face when Lecter mentions her wife, and remembers an article he read about Mason Verger’s death.

The man had been rendered quadriplegic from a fall into a pigpen, and had been mauled nearly to death by his pigs until his sister rescued him.

His sister had cared for him for over three years, and then he had asphyxiated on a chicken bone when she stepped out of the room to greet her girlfriend, Alana, at the door.

Mason had changed his will to leave all his wealth to Margot, allegedly because of how she had taken care of him.

He had even donated sperm before his untimely death, which allowed Alana Bloom to give birth to her son, Marquise.

“And what about you, *Professor* Crawford? Is your wife responding well to treatment?”

Crawford tightens his hand on his cane. “Bella is doing just fine, thank you.”

Barney arrives with the extra seats, and Will thanks him as he leaves.

Chilton sits down, crossing his legs. “Enough with the pleasantries. I’d like to get home before 9:00, so how about we get down to business?”

Lecter gives Chilton a faint look of dislike, but quickly masks it with a diplomatic smile. “Indeed. What brings you to my humble abode?”

“Will brought up something interesting to me yesterday in class,” Crawford begins, watching Lecter closely. “He thinks you might be responsible for one of the FBI’s cold cases. I’d like to know if he’s right.”

“Partly responsible,” Will amends instinctively, then shrinks down when Crawford gives him a withering look.

Lecter catches it, and his face tightens ever so slightly.

“And what is it that young Will believes I’m responsible for?”

“Quite a few things, if that outburst in class means anything,” Crawford continues.

Lecter smirks. “Well, don’t keep me in suspense, *Professor.*”

Crawford’s mouth tightens a bit. “Have you ever heard of The Muralist?”

Lecter’s eyes widen noticeably, and he tilts his head to look at Will.

Will gives him a stubborn frown, and a smile creeps up on Lecter's face, showing his teeth for the first time in Will's memory.

"You want to know if I killed the white man in the center. The answer is yes, I did. His name was James Grey – a rather troubled man if I do say so. Killing him was the kindest thing I could have done. He was quite pleased to become a part of his greatest work. I also cut off his leg and made a delicious osso buco with saffron-scented risotto and zucchini balls. The *left* leg to be precise. Was that all?"

No one seems to know what to say to that.

Dr. Bloom and Crawford share a look of disbelief, while Chilton just sits there, dumbstruck.

Will leans forward, emboldened by Lecter's cavalier attitude.

"What about Elliot Buddish? You might know him as The Angel Maker."

"Elliot Buddish killed himself, Will," Crawford interjects. "I worked that case myself. I saw his body."

Will scoffs, leaning back in his chair again. "You're telling me that Buddish somehow managed to flay the skin off his own back to make perfectly shaped wings, and then – miraculously not passing out from pain or blood loss – hung himself from the rafters of an old barn? No, I don't believe that."

Lecter looks even more delighted by this. "I'm afraid you're wrong, Professor Crawford. I did indeed assist Mr. Buddish in his transformation. The man had already castrated himself. It seemed only fair to help him finish the job. Unfortunately, due to his illness I had no desire to eat him, but I thoroughly enjoyed drinking in the sight of him when I was done."

Chilton looks like he's going to be sick, but Will is unmoved, simply satisfied that his *hunches* are being vindicated.

"What about Lawrence Wells?" Will continues. "He built a totem pole out of his victims with his own unknown son at the top."

"Last time I checked, Will, Mr. Wells was very much alive and confessed to every murder."

Will leans forward again. "I read the notes on his interrogation. He mentioned wanting to leave a legacy, to be *remembered.* Those aren't his words. That isn't his pathology. He got off on the fact that he was invisible, that he could wave at a lady and smile, chew the fat with her at church, knowing he killed her husband. He liked knowing where all his victims were buried. He could've died happy, secure in the knowledge that the police never knew he existed, but suddenly he gets the idea to dig them all up and turn them into a monument? It doesn't make sense to me."

Lecter leans forward in his own seat, attention fixed on Will. "What a cunning boy you are," he says, accent thick with some unidentifiable emotion. He straightens up again. "Mr. Wells and I met just briefly at a coffee shop in Grafton, West Virginia. I was attending a conference

on a new drug for schizophrenia and Bipolar Disorder – Lurasidone – on September 16th, 2009. I'm sure there's a record of my attendance. I mentioned a connection between several deaths. Mr. Wells became quite distraught over this, so I gave him some advice. I told him that a man of his talents shouldn't have to die in obscurity. He exceeded my expectations. I'd have loved to see the finished piece up close, but pictures were a suitable substitute."

"And Eldon Stammets? The Mushroom Man?"

Lecter grimaces. "Perhaps I spoke too soon. I'm afraid I had nothing to do with *that one.*"

To everyone's surprise, Will smiles. "Thank you. I needed to make sure you weren't just going along with everything I said to screw with me."

"What makes you think I'm not lying?"

"You like exposing your victims to the world, making everyone see their humiliation. Burying people in neat little rows in the middle of a forest? That's not your idea of entertainment."

"My, my, what an excellent student you are. I'd love to sit down and pick your brains someday."

"Are you talking metaphorically, Doctor, or should I grab you a fork?" Will answers flippantly.

Lecter smiles again. "I can see why Professor Crawford is so fond of you." He switches his attention to the teacher in question. "It must be humbling that someone half your age with none of your experience understands my mind better than you ever will."

Crawford tightens his hand around his cane again. "As long as he keeps getting me information like this, I think I can live with it." He turns to Will. "Is that all of them?"

"For now," Will admits.

"I wish you the best of luck, Will," Lecter says, smiling at him. "This has been vastly entertaining. And while we're on the subject of confessions, I suppose admitting to Cassie Boyle's murder now is merely a formality."

Chilton chokes on his own spit, finally making a noise for the first time since he sat down. "This is unbelievable. I need to make some calls. This is going to be front page news!"

"Hold on," Crawford interjects. "Let's not turn this into a media circus until we have more evidence. He could still be lying."

"He knows *details* about the crimes. Things I've never even *heard of.* This is going to make my career. I wonder if Lounds is available for an interview."

Lecter watches this all with a smug, amused smile, hands folded behind his head. He catches Will's gaze and gives him a wink. Will blushes and looks away.

“We can’t cover this up, Jack. Their families deserve to know what happened,” Dr. Bloom says.

Lecter smiles sharply. “How moral you present yourself as, Dr. Bloom. It’s no wonder Will adores you so. I wonder, though, if he’s ever gotten a glimpse of *your* dirty little secrets.”

Dr. Bloom freezes, momentarily panicked.

Will feels a sense of protectiveness wash over him, and he takes his glasses off, forcing himself to read all the little details on Lecter’s face.

“I’m entirely aware that Dr. Bloom and her wife are not perfect, Dr. Lecter,” he says firmly, drawing the doctor’s attention back to him. “I know they weren’t too broken up when Mason Verger had his *accident* in the pigpen, but considering his temperament, I’m not surprised. It was probably the best thing that could’ve happened for Mrs. Verger. She was a patient of yours, wasn’t she? I’m sure you understand her troubles better than anyone else.” He doesn’t quite know what he’s doing. He just has the instinctive feeling that Lecter won’t sell out Margot Verger. From the way the man spoke, it’s becoming eminently clear to Will that Lecter enjoys helping people in his own twisted way.

For a moment, Lecter looks conflicted, then he smiles again, showing his teeth.

“Tell you what, Dr. Chilton, wait and see how many other murders Will links to me until our conversations finish, and I’ll happily confess to the ones I committed.”

Chilton gives him a pompous look. “And if I refuse?”

“Then you’ll never get the full story from me. In fact, I’ll likely be put on trial again for these murders. What a pity for you if I’m declared sane this time and you lose your meal ticket to death row. That wouldn’t help your career much, now would it?”

Now Chilton looks conflicted. He glances at the professors and nods his head.

“We’ll keep this under wraps, but as soon as the kid finishes their interviews, I’m going to the FBI with this.”

“I’ll go with you,” Crawford tells him. “I’m sure Miriam Lass will listen to us.”

“I don’t like this, Jack,” Dr. Bloom says.

“Like you said, Alana, their families deserve to know what happened to them. If there are more victims, Will can find them.”

Will looks at the ground, and hopes the man is right.

The others leave abruptly, and Will is momentarily unsure about what to do.

He glances up at Lecter once more, and says, “Thank you for speaking with me, Dr. Lecter. I’ll see you next week.”

“It’s a pleasure, Will, I assure you.”

Will starts to gather up the chairs, but Barney returns, insisting he can do it.

Will thanks him and starts to leave, putting his glasses back on as he walks.

Gideon pipes up from his cell, “Must’ve been a pleasant conversation. I haven’t seen Chilton this excited since Lecter took a bite out of that nurse’s face.”

Will pauses, then shrugs and leans against the wall opposite Gideon’s cell. “I’ve apparently helped make his career, and now I feel sort of dirty.”

“Oh, I’m sure Lecter already has a plan to fuck him over, so don’t feel too bad.”

Will smiles. “Thanks, that actually makes me feel better.”

“Always happy to help out a friend.” Gideon leans forward. “Just between you and me, I think nothing would please our esteemed administrator more than seeing you locked up next to Lecter, available 24-7 for him to poke and prod until he figures out how your brain works.”

Will shudders. “He’d probably kill me if he heard this, but I think that’s something Chilton and Dr. Lecter have in common.”

“You’re probably right about that, although between the two of them, I’d prefer Chilton. He’s easier to ignore.”

Will nods. “I’d better get going.”

Back in Chilton’s office, the others have finished sorting out their agreement.

“I think Mr. Graham should agree to submit himself to some psychological testing,” Chilton is saying as Will walks in.

“No tests,” Will insists, disturbed by the thoughts flooding through his head. A vision of Chilton cutting his skull open and poking at his exposed brain – trying to figure out what makes him *tick* – causes him to shudder.

“That really isn’t necessary,” Dr. Bloom argues. “I’ve talked to him about what he can do. It’s nothing more than empathy and a good imagination.”

“Oh, come now, Dr. Bloom, don’t tell me you want to keep him for yourself. That party trick he pulled with Lecter, I’ve never seen anything like it.”

It doesn’t surprise me that you don’t understand empathy, you narcissistic idiot, Will thinks viciously.

“It’s not a party trick. It’s just…understanding.”

“And how do you *understand* something like Lecter?” Chilton asks derisively.

Will gives him a stoic look. “You just need a bit of empathy, Dr. Chilton. Certainly they taught you that while you were studying psychology.”

In the end, Will gets his way. No one tries to test him.

Chapter End Notes

Did you like it? I got the idea of making Hannibal the secret mastermind behind so many murders from Folie à Deux by The_Clever_Magpie (which is a phenomenal story, by the way).

The relationship between Hannibal and Will is still pretty antagonistic, but Hannibal is starting to respect him, among other things. (In my head, when Will says the line, "I needed to make sure you weren’t just going along with everything I said to screw with me." Hannibal's thought-train is basically, "Oh, I'd *love* to screw with you.") Ha!

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Understanding

Chapter Summary

> Will talks with one of Dr. Lecter's former patients, and begins to build a clearer picture of the man's motivations.

Chapter Notes

> This is a bit of a filler chapter featuring one of my favourite minor characters. Don't worry, we're just building up to the interesting parts.
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

> Sunday, February 14th – Friday, February 19th
>
> Even though she knows it's a terrible idea, Beverly drags Will and Ardelia to her friend Beth's house for a Valentine's Day party.
>
> "It'll be fun. Trust me!" she insists on the way over. Ardelia looks dubious, and Will isn't exactly looking forward to some stilted conversations with strangers, half of which will likely end up skipping school tomorrow. He hopes Beverly restrains herself. Crawford wouldn't appreciate her showing up to his class with a hangover. He's the type of asshole who would talk louder just to increase her suffering.
>
> Once they arrive it doesn't take long before Bev hooks up with another student – tall with long, shaggy hair, ripped jeans, smelling vaguely like a skunk – and leaves her friends to their own devices.
>
> They're reluctant to join in the celebration, largely because of their single status.
>
> "So, uh, should we make out or something?" Will jokes, flashing his roommate a crooked smile.
>
> Ardelia punches him in the shoulder. "I managed to smuggle a book into my purse. I'm gonna go find a quiet place to read. Just find a wall to blend into. Bev will come get us when she's ready to go home."
>
> After she leaves, he grows increasingly uncomfortable around all the people. There are at least four different couples making out on the couches, the music is so loud it's making his

teeth vibrate, and one group of friends are standing around someone's phone, watching a video on how to turn an apple into a bong.

He wanders upstairs until he finds a quiet room to hide in. It looks like a guest bedroom. There's a noticeable layer of dust on the end table that shows the room hasn't been used recently. The sounds of music and laughter are muffled, and he lets out a sigh of relief, laying back on the bed with his eyes closed.

After only a few minutes of peace, someone knocks tentatively on the door and opens it. He sits up to find an older woman, maybe twenty-five or so, standing in the hallway. He reaches over to turn on the lamp next to the bed so she can see him. "Can I help you?"

It takes a moment for her to speak. "Um, excuse me. Are you the guy who's interviewing Hannibal Lecter this year?" she asks, twirling her blond hair nervously.

Will feels his hackles rise. "Why do you want to know?"

"Um, I'm Georgia…Madchen…I was one of his patients."

Will stares at her in surprise, then shifts on the bed, offering her a seat.

She shuts the door behind her and takes it, smiling at him and running her hands over the flowery blanket. "It's Will, right? Will Graham? You're the guy who…you've got a reputation when it comes to understanding killers."

He nods reluctantly, wondering which of his classmates is spreading rumours about him around campus. Probably Krendler. Maybe he should've let Beverly beat him up after all.

She looks down, still toying with her hair. "I'm not sure how to explain this. My mom would kill me if she found out I talked to you. She doesn't want me to even *mention* Dr. Lecter."

Will bites his lip, wondering how he's supposed to respond to that. He runs a hand through his hair "Well, your mom isn't here right now, and I don't plan on talking to her." He gives her a crooked smile which she returns.

"I know he's done terrible things," she begins. "But if it weren't for him, I'd be dead, or worse. I used to be very sick. I was in and out of hospitals for years. When my mom finally took me to see him, I was about ready to give up. He diagnosed my condition – Cotard's Syndrome – within five minutes of meeting me. He also offered to cover the cost of my treatment. A few months later, I was back in school, making friends. I was *normal* again."

Will studies her. "Why are you telling me this?"

She bites her lip, still fidgeting with her hair, before she starts to explain. "People say he's evil incarnate, incapable of kindness, but what he did for me – he could've toyed with me for years, made me go even crazier, or just let me rot away, but he didn't. He saved my life. I know what he is, but I'm still grateful. I just wanted you to understand that he's *not* a monster, no matter what everyone says. A monster wouldn't have helped me."

He nods slowly, but hesitantly. “I don’t know why he helped you, if that’s what you want me to understand. Maybe he wanted to bolster his reputation as a humanitarian.”

Georgia looks stricken, and abruptly stops playing with her hair. “Is that all? Helping me was just a way to make himself look good?”

Will stares at her, takes off his glasses, and tries to see her as Lecter would, tries to picture her at the end of her rope, desperate for someone to help her before she drowns in her own madness.

“You’re so small,” he begins, speaking softly, the cadence of his voice unconsciously mimicking Lecter’s speech patterns. “And vulnerable. But your eyes are so bright I can almost see my reflection in them. I don’t want to watch them go dull when you take your own life. It would be such a waste to see you snuffed out like that.”

Will comes out of his trance to see that Georgia looks both afraid and captivated. “Is that true? Did he help me because he didn’t want me to die?”

“I think so.” He fumbles with his glasses for a moment, then puts them away. “He felt… compassion for you. You’d struggled so hard all your life, but you were still fighting. He admired that.”

Georgia smiles, and then leans over to kiss him on the cheek. He freezes, unused to such contact, but manages not to make a fool of himself.

“Thank you for understanding. Please, could you tell him I said thank you? No, wait, on second thought, I doubt he’d remember me.”

Will smiles at her genuinely. “I don’t think he could forget you, Georgia. Thank you for telling me this. It’s helped me understand him a lot better.”

Beverly opens the door then, Ardelia hovering behind her. “Will? There you are! Move it, Graham Cracker. Addy’s about to have a panic attack. Oh! Did we interrupt something?” She’s starting to grin.

Will ducks his head, giving Georgia a farewell smile. “Guess this is goodbye. It was nice meeting you, Georgia.”

She nods, practically beaming. “Nice to meet you too, Will.”

The three of them pile into Bev’s car, and she teases him all the way home about his new girlfriend.

“Did you guys do anything before I got there? Did you use protection? Do you *have* protection? Should I stop at the drugstore and ask for some? Do you need lube?”

“Do you need a punch in the head?”

“Not while she’s driving!” Ardelia snaps. “Both of you, shut it! Beth says we’re having a pop quiz in Law and Violence tomorrow and I need to go over my notes.”

“But if it’s a pop quiz, how does she know about it?” Will asks.

“The teacher likes her. He gave her a hint last week and she only now deigned to share this information.”

“We’re not talking about that right now. We’re talking about our baby boy finally being *deflowered.*” Beverly fans herself with her hand, carrying on like a dramatic southern belle.

Will waits until they’re at an intersection before he smacks her.

“She kissed me on the cheek. That’s all. There was no *deflowering* happening.”

He's reluctant to repeat what Georgia said to him about Lecter, and decides not to mention it.

When they get home, Ardelia rushes to get out her notes.

“I can drive you back if you want another shot at her. We’ll grab some condoms on the way over,” Bev teases.

Will throws a couch pillow at her and rushes up the stairs to his room before she can counter.

On Friday, Will goes to see Dr. Bloom at their usual time, and finds her sitting at her desk in a daze.

He knocks on the open door. “Dr. Bloom, is something wrong?”

She shakes herself out of her stupor, and looks up at him with sad eyes. “I’m sorry, Will. I know I sound like a broken record, but I just can’t stop thinking about how *bad* talking to Dr. Lecter is for you.”

Will can’t entirely disagree, but forces a smile. “I can handle it, and don’t worry, nothing he says about you will change how much I respect you.”

“I’d rather you didn’t speak about me at all, Will,” she replies, unnerved.

He looks away. “I’ll try to avoid it, but if that’s what it takes to get Lecter to talk, I might not have a choice.”

“You always have a choice when it comes to Hannibal. It’s just that he makes you feel like you don’t. Margot and I know that feeling intimately. Her brother…” she stops talking.

Will glances down the empty hallway and shuts the door behind him, leaning against it. “Her brother didn’t fall into a pigpen. Lecter cut his face off, then broke his neck. He left him alive so Margot could finish him off,” he deduces.

Dr. Bloom puts her head in her hands, shuddering. “You have to understand, Will, Mason was a monster. He made Margot’s life a living hell. She’s just *covered* in scars.” She wipes her eyes. “Dr. Lecter introduced us, you know. She was one of his patients. Dr. Lecter and I, we’d had…a fling, I guess you could call it. He was my mentor at Johns Hopkins. I admired him.

He was never afraid to take on difficult cases, though a part of me wonders if he just enjoyed seeing their misery."

"I don't think that's completely true," Will tells her, crossing his arms as he thinks back to their previous interactions. "He's not a psychopath – not in the clinical sense – he's capable of compassion, kindness, maybe even love. It's just that he can turn those things off whenever he wants."

She looks up at him, tears blurring in her eyes. "Love? What makes you think that?"

He frowns thoughtfully. "The Hobbs case. The girl they found in her bedroom – Elise Nichols – the way she was tucked into bed, there was so much *love* in that setting. But compare that to the Cassie Boyle, the girl they found impaled on antlers in a field. There was no love for her. It's almost like he *knew* what Garret Jacob Hobbs felt for his victims, and created a photo negative. For him to understand that so clearly, he *has* to be able to feel them himself, in some way, doesn't he?"

Dr. Bloom shakes her head. "Will, emotional empathy and cognitive empathy are two different things. Psychopaths use cognitive empathy to understand emotions well enough to manipulate people. That doesn't mean they can feel them."

"You're forgetting compassionate empathy. I brought up Margot last week because I *knew* Lecter felt compassion for her. He's not going to sell her out, even if it would be entertaining for him. He likes her too much."

"And what is it that makes him like people?" she asks.

He pauses, then shakes his head. "I don't know, but once I figure that out, I'll be able to predict him, maybe even manipulate him."

"You're playing a dangerous game, Will."

"Maybe, but I'm going to win."

Chapter End Notes

I loved Georgia. Honestly, for a few moments I thought she and Will had some chemistry. Then Hannibal had to go and kill her in the most horrible way. Well, not in my fic! In this universe, she was diagnosed and treated in her late teens by Dr. Lecter, and is now healthy and happy. Her friend, Beth LeBeau, is still alive, and is also the person who hosted the party and who told Ardelia about the pop quiz. (No one should have their face ripped off by their best friend.)

So now Will knows about Alana's dirty little secret. Suddenly the person he admires isn't so pure anymore, and he's pretty much become an accomplice to murder by not saying anything. I wonder what effect that will have on him...

A brief explanation for the different types of empathy:

Cognitive Empathy is the largely conscious drive to recognize accurately and understand another's emotional state. Sometimes we call this kind of empathy "perspective-taking." This is the type of empathy that Will Graham is a master of.

Emotional Empathy, also called affective empathy or primitive empathy, is the subjective state resulting from emotional contagion. It is our automatic drive to respond appropriately to another's emotions.

Compassionate Empathy: With this kind of empathy we not only understand a person's predicament and feel with them, but are spontaneously moved to help, if needed.

I can't talk about empathy without mentioning autism. Just to clarify, the autistic brain can have a lot of difficulty deciphering the cues people send out when they're emotionally distressed, but that doesn't mean that people on the spectrum are incapable of compassion. Once they learn to recognize the signs, they can actually be *more* likely to react to another person's distress than a neurotypical person. Of course, there's the double-edged sword that once they learn to recognize another person's pain, they can have trouble regulating their own emotional responses, but that can be taught as well. It's more a difficulty of filtering outside stimuli than anything else. I say "can" because every person is different, even when they have the same diagnosis.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Agendas

Chapter Summary

> Will and Dr. Lecter have a pleasant conversation that turns distinctly *unpleasant* when Jack Crawford's motivations are brought up.

Chapter Notes

> This chapter was pretty short at first. I had to add in a few rambles to stretch it out, but I think they add something to Will's character.
>
> We're almost at the half-way point, and I'm really excited to get there. I figured out the perfect way to make Will and Hannibal grow closer in the next few chapters.
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 6 – Saturday, February 20th, 2016

"Sorry about the ambush last week," Will says by way of introduction. He sets his book-bag down next to his chair and takes a seat. "They kind of sprang it on me. I couldn't say no."

Lecter smiles reassuringly. "It wasn't a bother, Will. On the contrary, it was quite entertaining."

Will huffs out a laugh. "Yeah, I guess it would be for you."

"I'm curious," Lecter says, tilting his head. "Which classes are you attending?"

Will glances up at him, unsure if he should answer.

"Come now, I simply want to make sure you have all the tools required to be a psychiatrist."

"Who says I want to be a psychiatrist?"

"Answering a question with a question? Perhaps I don't need to learn about your classes after all. You've already mastered that particular talent."

Will shrinks down in his seat, embarrassed. It's probably intentional on Lecter's part, but he's too tired to care.

“I’m taking four classes, as well as doing a thesis for Dr. Bloom.”

Lecter smiles again. “And what are they?”

Will shuffles around a bit before answering, “Forensic Psychology with Professor Crawford, Advanced Human Anatomy and Physiology with Dr. Breitkopf, Sensory Processes with Professor Adams, and Stress and Mental Health with Dr. Turner.”

“Which is your favourite class?”

“Not Anatomy,” Will answers without thinking, then blushes. “Maybe Forensics? I don’t know. I’m *good* at it, but sometimes I hate it.”

“So we’re down to Sensory Processes and Stress and Mental Health,” Lecter says sagely. “Which interests you the most?”

“Funny enough, I actually *like* Sensory Processes. I didn’t think I would.”

“Why not?”

Will bites his lip. “It tends to get glossed over in favour of Freud and Jung in Psychology 101, but in all honesty, understanding how a minor change of perception can alter the way a person relates to their environment is *huge.* I never really thought about how important it is that my eyes and ears work as well as they do. I mean, there are some people who are completely face-blind. Er, that is, prosum…proson…” He pauses, searching for the word.

“Prosopagnosia,” Lecter says helpfully. “I’m familiar with that condition. It’s an inability to recognize faces, even those of familiar people, usually as the result of brain damage, but occasionally it’s inborn. The term was coined by Joachim Bodamer in 1947, and most famously described in Oliver Sacks’ 1985 book, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat.*”

“Right!” Will replies, smiling. “We were reading about a woman who was born with pretty severe prosopagnosia. Her mother had it too. There was this one time they were supposed to meet up at an amusement park, so the girl is just sitting on a bench, waiting for her mother to show up, and next to her is an older woman who turned out to be her mother!” He laughs. “They’d been sitting right next to each other, but because they were wearing new clothes and had their hair up differently, neither one could recognize the other!”

Lecter nods. “It’s a very difficult condition to understand, yet many people actually have a milder version and don’t realize it until they’re professionally tested.”

Will nods back enthusiastically. “Yeah, but that’s not the most interesting part. It’s the fact that her condition forced her to seek out unique social circles. She couldn’t handle hanging out with the *popular crowd* because all pretty people look alike to her. So, she started hanging out with the punk kids. You know, the ones who dye their hair green or purple, or have a hundred piercings on their faces. It was a lot easier for her to pick them out in a crowd. I mean, your friends have a profound impact on what kind of person you grow up to be, so if she *didn't* have that condition, would she still be the same?”

“You’re certainly passionate,” Lecter comments. “That’s good. There’s nothing worse than an indifferent student.” He pauses for a moment. “Your Stress and Mental Health class, what is that like?”

Will shrugs. “It’s not bad. We’re studying how stress can affect your physical health. One cool thing we learned recently is that long-term depression can actually alter segments of your DNA that are associated with longevity and overall health.” He pauses, wondering how much Lecter has kept up to date on biomedical research while imprisoned. “Do you know what telomeres are?”

Lecter tilts his head. “I’m not familiar with them. Would you care to explain?”

“Okay, um, they’re segments of DNA found on the ends of your chromosomes. They protect them from deterioration when your cells are dividing. They’ve been compared to the plastic bits on the ends of your shoelaces.” He lifts his foot up onto his knee, pinching one of his shoelaces between his fingers to show off the part he means, then sets it back down. “The older you get, the shorter your telomeres are, but depression has also been found to shorten them as well, or maybe having shorter telomeres can *lead* to depression. The research is still in its infancy. They’re also the reason why cloned animals often end up with diseases associated with old age. Since clones are grown from older cells, and older cells have shorter telomeres, that leads to the cloned animals aging prematurely. It’s really fascinating.” He pauses again, ducking his head. “We actually didn’t learn that in class. I looked it up later.”

Lecter sits back in his chair, tenting his hands on the desk. “So you have an inquisitive mind to go along with your passion. Tell me something, Will, is that why Jack Crawford is so determined that *you* will get into my head? Or is he merely using you empathy disorder as his trump card?”

Will feels his smile slip away, unhappy with the way the conversation has shifted. “It’s not like that. I’m just trying to get a good grade. If I have to use my *empathy disorder* to do so, then what does it matter?”

“I would agree, however, it’s clearly distressing for you, and yet you go along with it.”

Will scowls at him, knowing that Lecter will likely go back to being uncooperative unless he answers. It was stupid of him to drop his guard, even for a few minutes. He can’t forget who he’s dealing with.

“Professor Crawford doesn’t have anything left to give. His job at the FBI is gone, his wife is dying, he’s disabled and in constant pain, he’s lost the respect of most of his colleagues, and if it weren’t for the fact that he helped catch *you,* he would’ve been fired for the stunt he pulled with Miriam Lass instead of given early retirement and a cushy teaching job. All he has left is this. He wants to expose your life, to make everyone see that you’re just as pathetic as he is. If it helps him get his foot back in the door of the FBI, more’s the better.”

“That’s not exactly a good reason for me to indulge you, Will.”

Will leans back in his seat, crossing his arms, and tilting his chin up defiantly. “You don’t have to indulge me, Dr. Lecter. I’ll figure you out one way or another. I just wanted to make

it clear to you that I'm only doing this for the grade."

"If that's what you want to believe, Will, I won't dissuade you of that notion."

Will frowns at him, loosening his stiff posture. "What do you mean by that?"

Lecter leans forward, folding his hands on his desk. "I think, Will, that you've started to find me interesting."

Will scoffs at the man's persistence. "Believe what you want. It takes more than a few secret murders to impress me, Doctor."

"Then what *does* impress you, dear Will?"

"Resilience in the face of hardship," he answers immediately. Then he smiles. "Makes me think of an old patient of yours, Georgia Madchen. We ran into each other at a party last Sunday. She wanted me to pass on her thanks to you for saving her life."

Lecter is momentarily put off, before he smiles genuinely. "Miss Madchen, yes I remember her. Cotard's Syndrome, wasn't it? She was an exceptional case. How is she?"

Will shrugs. "She's in school. We didn't talk for long. She heard I was interviewing you and wanted to talk." He hesitates before disclosing the other things she'd said. "She also wanted to tell me that she doesn't think you're a monster, no matter what you did."

Lecter tilts his head, smiling fondly. "She's rather naïve, don't you think?"

"I can't say she's entirely wrong," Will admits. "I don't think you're a monster either. You helped Georgia. You helped Margot. You're even helping me in your own way."

"Perhaps *you* are naïve as well."

Will laughs. "Oh, I don't doubt you have your own agenda, Dr. Lecter, but that doesn't mean I can't be grateful."

Lecter tilts his head, acknowledging this.

"I suppose everyone you know has their own agenda. Even Alana Bloom. Tell me, is the reason you're staying silent about her involvement in Mason Verger's death because you believe he got what he deserved?"

Will stiffens. "I'd rather not talk about that, Dr. Lecter."

"Why not? Nobody is recording us. We can say whatever we like."

"That's not what I meant. Dr. Bloom doesn't want me talking about her with you. I'm respecting that."

"*Respect,*" Lecter hisses, smiling. "Is respect the reason you were so quick to jump to her defense? Odd how you can justify her own homicidal tendencies while condemning mine. Or

perhaps your affections for her are more *carnal* in nature."

Will glares at him. "If you'll recall, I also avoided bringing up *your* involvement. You know, the part where you're likely the reason Mason Verger was paralyzed in the first place."

Lecter grins, exposing his sharp canines. "So you hold myself and Dr. Bloom in the same esteem? Will, I'm flattered you think so highly of me."

"Anyone ever tell you, you can be a real smartass sometimes?" The words slip out before Will can even think about how dangerous it is to say something like that to a man like him.

Lecter doesn't even acknowledge the insult beyond a twitch of his lips.

"You feel Mason's death was justified given his character. I can assure you that the people I killed deserved to die as well, just not for the same reasons."

Will continues to glare at the doctor. "In your mind, maybe, but most people have learned to tolerate a little rudeness once in a while, Dr. Lecter. We don't use it as an excuse to cut someone open and rip out their vital organs for a snack."

Lecter's smile makes him look almost guileless. "They offended me the same way child abuse offends you, dear Will. My actions were not so disproportionate to their crimes if you look at it from my perspective."

"Oh, don't even start," Will says, crossing his arms. "What? Just because the suicide route didn't work on me, you're going to try the homicide one? Give me a break. I'm not falling for that either."

He grins, eyes glittering with delight. "A man can dream, can't he? Personally, I think you'd look beautiful kneeling over your first kill. Have you ever seen blood in the moonlight, Will? It appears quite black."

Unwillingly, an image of just that pops into Will's mind. Seeing himself covered in blood, and holding a knife over a faceless woman's severed throat as moonlight streams in through a window. He shakes his head to clear it, trying to slow his racing heart.

"Yeah, well…whatever does it for you, I suppose," he mutters defensively, shrinking into himself. "I think it's about time for me to leave."

"So it is. Goodnight, Will. Pleasant dreams. I know mine will be."

He shakes his head, hoisting his book-bag up onto his shoulder. "You're laying on the creepy murderer vibe pretty thick tonight, Doctor. Might want to take it down a notch."

"Whatever makes you more comfortable, Will," Lecter replies, smile never wavering.

"*Goodnight,* Dr. Lecter."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry if parts of this seemed disjointed. The next ones will be better. Oh! And I'm rewriting the ending a bit, adding in more details and such. I'll probably get that done this week. It won't slow down updates at all, promise.

Can you tell that I love science? Genetics and psychology are my favourites, but I occasionally watch documentaries on physics and space. There's just so much to learn!

People have been commenting that they love my little rambles in my notes. I'm glad they're not a bother. I decided to add a bit of that trait to Will's character, (being sassy is something we already share). He's young and enthusiastic about learning new things, not burned-out and miserable from seeing too much. He must be such a breath of fresh air to Hannibal. (Not that I think I'm that great. I doubt Hannibal would like me all that much if he were real. I don't go out my way to be rude to people, *especially* waiters, but I'm such a picky eater that I'd never be able to enjoy anything he cooked!)

Oh, and the plastic tubes on the end of your shoelaces are called aglets. Just a bit of trivia I learned while studying epigenetics.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Terror

Chapter Summary

A new killer terrorizes Baltimore, and Will grows increasingly fascinated by them, all the while trying to ignore his frustrating thoughts about Lecter.

Chapter Notes

Hey, just a heads up, tomorrow's update might be a bit late. I'm going shopping in the morning. My nephew's birthday party is on Sunday and I haven't gotten him anything yet. Oh, and next Wednesday's update might be late too. I'm going to go pick up my new glasses, and buy some new clothes. Other than that, everything should stay on schedule, although I might miss a day or two later this month when I go out of town with my stepdad...Oh, well, I'll still be finished before March. Promise.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, February 21st – Friday, February 26th

Will tries to put Dr. Lecter's behaviour out of his mind, knowing that the man is just trying to rile him up.

By Sunday night, he's managed to distract himself by binge-watching the new *Cosmos* episodes on the television downstairs.

The door opens, and Beverly walks in, humming under her breath, almost skipping. "I owe you big-time, Graham," she announces, plopping down next to him on the couch.

He pauses his show. "I take it the interview went well." Meaning, of course, her latest meeting with Garret Jacob Hobbs.

Bev shakes her hair out of her ponytail, grinning. "He told me everything. It's pretty messed up, but I think I'm starting to understand why he killed those girls. I might be able to finish my report by next week."

Will feels slightly envious, aware that his own assignment is progressing much slower than hers.

"That's good. Popcorn?" he asks, handing her a plastic bowl full of it.

“Don’t mind if I do,” she responds, digging out a handful and shoving most of it into her mouth, spilling little kernels on her shirt.

“You’re vacuuming the couch later,” Will tells her in response.

She sticks out her tongue and grabs another handful. “So, how’d *your* interview go?”

Will scowls at the TV.

“That good, huh?” she replies, smirking. “You getting *anywhere* with him?”

“I just need a new approach.”

She shrugs. “Well, good luck. Hey, I love this show! Can you start the episode over?”

Will hands her the remote. “I’ve already seen it. Go ahead and watch. I need to look over my notes.”

With that he retreats, not noticing Beverly’s gaze as it follows him, full of trepidation.

In Crawford’s class, the lecture is about the effects of child abuse on the developing psyche, and how that plays into psychopathic behaviours.

“Let’s get this out of the way right now. Being abused does not mean that you are destined to abuse your own children. That’s a myth that needs to die, right now,” their professor states firmly. “However, the childhoods of serial killers have been an interest to behavioural psychologists for decades. Some people believe that if we could find early warning signs and treat them, we could prevent potential serial killers from ever harming anyone. It’s an idealistic idea, but anything that stops murder is worthy of study.”

Will has a suspicion that Professor Crawford doesn’t hold such things in high opinion, but resolves to discuss it with Dr. Bloom during their usual meeting on Friday.

After school, Will goes home and turns on the news as he prepares a sandwich in the kitchen.

“*Details are limited at this time, but witnesses report that the box has been here since early this morning. The citizen who discovered the grisly contents is being treated for shock in the nearby ambulance.*”

Will peeks his head out of the kitchen, sandwich in hand, and squints at the television screen as the camera pans over a sidewalk crowded with rubberneckers.

Suddenly, there’s a commotion in the crowd as a woman pushes her way through it. “*Bruce! Brucey! Please, that’s my brother!*” She falls to her knees next to a box, and Will gets a glimpse of the so-called *grisly contents.*

Is that a person? Will thinks, blinking stupidly at the television. The man, the *body,* is folded up, knees twisted around and bent so that his feet reach his hips. There are obvious signs of strangulation as shown by a red, raw line across the throat, as well as rope burns on the

wrists. His fingernails are painted black, and from what Will can see, it looks like he's wearing makeup.

Without even thinking about it, he starts to recreate the killer's thoughts during the disposal.

I tuck him into the box carefully, arranging his limbs so he's folded up enough to fit. I wish I didn't have to do this. It was almost perfect.

Strange. There's so much regret. But paired with the torture he obviously committed, it's almost as if he believed his victim didn't deserve compassion until he was dead.

The ease at which he gets into that mindset disturbs him.

He continues to mull over it even during classes, annoying more than one of his professors. He keeps a close eye on the news, even going on Tattle Crime for more information.

He learns that the man found in the box was Bruce Philips. The strangest thing about it, in Will's opinion, is that Bruce was a natural blond, yet when his body was found, his hair was dyed black. Paired with the makeup and nail polish, it's clear the killer put in a lot of effort to make Bruce look a certain way.

Dyeing for your art, Will thinks wryly, then shudders, wondering when he'd started calling murder *art.*

On Wednesday, he comes home at around 2:30 and switches on the news again. He's rewarded with another breaking news report.

"*A serial killer is terrorizing Baltimore,*" the newswoman is saying.

Will takes a seat on the couch, watching the news report raptly.

"*The body of Justin Marks was discovered just an hour ago, mutilated and stuffed into a box, just as Bruce Philips was. His girlfriend, Connie Foster, has been reported missing. It is unknown whether she was abducted as well, but police are urging citizens to be on the lookout.*"

Two pictures flash on the screen. The one on the left is Justin Marks: handsome, with long brown hair. The one on the right is Connie Foster: pretty, long dark hair, and a beautiful smile. Very generic.

Will wonders if she knows that her boyfriend is dead, if she's dying right now.

It's too disturbing to think about. He shuts the television off and goes upstairs to study.

On Thursday, he sees Georgia Madchen among a group of girls in the hallway.

He thinks about approaching her, telling her that he forwarded her thanks to Lecter, but decides against it.

He doubts she really wants to hear anything from Lecter. Will was just a way for her to alleviate her guilt.

By Friday morning there is a third victim, Byron Sadler, who shows an escalation of torture, including a dislocation of his jaw and all of his limbs, signs of crucifixion, (holes in his hands and feet), and death by exsanguination.

Will, Beverly, and Ardelia are lounging on the couch, watching as a newswoman reports that the FBI have been called in.

"*With Baltimore terrorized by a murderer, this reporter hopes that the FBI's assistance will bear fruit.*"

"This is crazy," Ardelia says as the story ends.

"Tell me about it," Will drawls.

"How long will he keep this up?" Beverly questions, looking to her friends for answers.

Will shakes his head. "He'll do this for as long as it takes for him to get it right."

"Get *what* right?" Ardelia probes, arching an eyebrow at him.

He rubs his face, feeling exhausted. "He's trying to do something – I'm not sure what – but until he does it, he's not going to stop."

Beverly stares at him. "Are you doing your…" She waves a finger around her head. "… thing?"

He sighs. "Yeah, I'm doing my thing. It's weird, though. You'd think a person capable of that kind of torture wouldn't feel remorse, but he tucks the bodies away so carefully, like he regrets having to hurt them."

The explanation doesn't seem to reassure either woman.

"Maybe we should stop talking about this," Ardelia hedges, flipping to a new channel.

Will bristles. It's not often that he talks about what he can do, and when people shut him down like that, it tends to rile him up.

"It's fine. Class starts soon. We'd better hurry."

"*You* don't have class until 11:00," Ardelia reminds him with a frown.

"Well, *yours* starts at 10:00, and I'd rather we stay together as a group."

She crosses her arms. "I don't need your protection. Need I remind you that he's targeting *men?*"

"Exactly, I want you two around to protect me." He grins, trying to lighten the mood.

Ardelia resists smiling for all of two seconds, while Bev punches him in the shoulder.

“I hate you sometimes, Graham,” Ardelia says, shaking her head.

“I love you too.”

Dr. Bloom seems distracted during their meeting, so Will looks up the information he needs on his own.

Many papers on serial killers blame insecure attachment to a maternal figure as a starting point.

Will has a hard time believing that is the sole explanation, but continues to delve into it.

Substance abuse in the home, as well as humiliating punishments are common (forced crossdressing, eating out of garbage cans, etc.).

Isolation from peers, intense fantasy life.

Will grows increasingly uncomfortable as he realizes how much his own childhood matches these descriptions, and is grateful that his father was never cruel to him. He doesn’t want to know what he would have become if Edric Graham had been like that.

When he finishes, he packs up his things and heads for Crawford’s classroom. The lecture is about mental illness and crime, but it’s obvious that few people are giving it the attention it deserves. News of the serial killer has spread across campus by now, and Will isn’t the only one who’s afraid to be alone.

“Professor?” Beverly calls out just as class is ending.

Will nearly groans aloud. He just wants to go home.

Crawford acknowledges her with a nod. “Yes, Ms. Katz?”

“Do you know anything about the new killer in Baltimore?”

Crawford shuffles some papers and leans against his cane. “I’m not anymore aware of what’s going on than you, Ms. Katz.”

“But isn’t it true that Miriam Lass is leading the investigation?”

Will blinks. He hadn’t known that.

“I’m aware that she is, but that’s *all* I know,” Crawford says firmly.

Will notes that he sounds almost bitter. “What’s your professional opinion?”

Crawford looks at him. “I’m sorry?” he says, his tone frustrated

Will isn’t sure what’s gotten into him, but he knows he won’t be able to sleep until he can make sense of these murders.

“How would you profile him?”

Crawford straightens, staring Will down determinedly.

“I don’t have any more details than what’s been on the news, but I can tell you that whoever is doing this isn’t going to stop.”

Will sits forward. “Why?”

“You tell me,” Crawford retorts.

Will closes his eyes, reconstructing what must have happened to the victims.

This has to work. Everything must be perfect. We’re going to do it right this time!

“He’s trying to bring a fantasy to life, but it will never work, because it will never be good enough. He’s just going to keep finding more people and doing the same things over and over again until he’s caught.”

He opens his eyes to find Crawford nodding. “The fantasy involves the torture and stretching of his victims, but before killing them, he fixes their hair and paints their nails. He has escalated to crucifying his latest victim, driving holes into his hands and feet. Historically, crucifixion is a sentence reserved for a serious crime, meaning that someone in the unsub’s – the *unknown subject’s* – past makes him feel that his victims have wronged him, so now he is performing some sort of inquisition. Although he is attempting to get his victims to repent or adhere to certain religious beliefs, he is hanging them as though they were victims of religious tribunals of the 1100s, but something in his fantasy is not working, since he keeps discarding the men while the sole female victim is still being kept. He kills his victims and then ritualistically places them in a box with tissue paper, which is odd because his initial behaviour dehumanizes them. This means that he values those victims more when they are dead. So far, he has spared one woman, whom he still has in captivity, and she is either witnessing the unsub’s actions or has been forced to participate in them. Crucifixion is sadistic and watching it is the ultimate torture. Consequently, the killings will continue to escalate as the unsub strives to achieve his perfection.”

At the end of his speech, Crawford looks triumphant, while his students exchange uneasy glances.

Will almost feels like applauding, yet he can’t help but think that Crawford’s interpretation is wrong.

In his head, he doesn’t feel like he’s conducting interrogations, it feels more like he’s directing a play.

It doesn’t matter. He knows Crawford wouldn’t understand. No matter how skilled the former BAU agent is, he has no idea how to truly understand a killer the way Will can.

Will leaves, dejected, and continues to think about the murders.

He prints off some of the reports – including the garish pictures – about the murders from Tattle Crime, intent on looking into it the next day.

Chapter End Notes

Uh...so...I cheated a bit. I'm a big fan of *Criminal Minds* - mostly because of Matthew Gray Gubler. He is *gorgeous!* - in fact, I've secretly been using the names of unsubs as characters in my fic.

Frank Breitkopf, Will's Anatomy professor, was one of the worst serial killers on the show, with more than a hundred speculated victims. He'd paralyze and lay them out on a table with a mirrored ceiling so they would be forced to watch as he cut them open. He also supposedly fell in love with one of his would-be victims, watched her for decades, and sent her wind-chimes made out of the bones of his other victims. She was traumatized and believed she'd been kidnapped by aliens for years until he returned and abducted her again. It was a very messed up relationship.

So, if you're a fan of *Criminal Minds,* you might already recognize the description of the killer from this chapter, in which case you might have some idea of where this is going. I hope I can still make it interesting for you.

I've actually read about studies on reducing antisocial behaviour in young children. Most tend to grow out of it on their own, but there are certain parenting styles that can alleviate the worst of it a lot sooner. Check it out if you're interested.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Phantasmagoria

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal have a discussion about the new serial killer in Baltimore.

Chapter Notes

We've passed the halfway mark! Yay! Now is when things start to get *really* interesting.

I see a few of you guessed who our mysterious killer is. I'm impressed. Considering how many episodes of *Criminal Minds* there are, it can be pretty difficult to keep track of all the killers. I had to rewatch the episode just to get the information I needed for this chapter, (Totally worth it).

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 7 – Saturday, February 27th, 2016

“Good evening, Doctor,” Will greets, trying to get into interview-mode.

He’s been preoccupied all day. He nearly burned the eggs that morning, something he never does. Beverly threatened to take him off of cooking duty until he reminded her that normal humans can’t subsist on takeout.

Of course, she’d replied that they were college students. They could survive on ramen noodles and beer until they turned twenty-five. Will had simply rolled his eyes and scraped their singed breakfast out of the pan.

“Good evening, Will. How are you?”

Will wonders how honestly he should answer that. “Fine, I guess. You?”

“As good as I can be.”

Will nods in response, eyes drifting around Lecter’s cell. His walls are covered in new drawings. One seems to be an eagle-eye view of the landscape of Paris, judging from the cut-off Eiffel Tower in the background. “Those are really good. You can even make out the pedestrians and the cars.”

“The devil is in the details.” Lecter eyes the younger man speculatively. “You seem distracted today, Will,” he remarks. He’s seated behind his desk as usual, hands folded over his newest sketch.

“Sorry,” Will offers, shaking himself out of his thoughts. “Saw something on the news. I can’t get it out of my head.”

“Hmm, you wouldn’t happen to be talking about the city’s newest killer?” Lecter asks, smiling fondly. He taps his finger on the newspaper sitting on his desk, indicating how he learned about it. “Baltimore certainly attracts some interesting characters.”

“That’s one way of putting it.” Will sighs and pulls out the photos of the victims from his bag to give them another look. “Crawford thinks it’s a religious nut who’s resurrecting the inquisition. Can’t exactly argue with him. I mean, crucifixion and dislocating limbs? Not exactly modern-day torture.”

“But you don’t agree?” the doctor prods slyly. “Perhaps I could take a look and offer my opinion?”

Will stares at him, suspicious, but decides to relent. He places the photographs into Lecter’s food tray and pushes it into the cell. Then he steps back as Lecter approaches. He picks them up one by one, examining them with a smile.

“What a good boy, putting away his toys so neatly after he’s finished playing.”

Though it’s an obvious attempt to goad him, Will doesn’t react to it. He’s too busy reeling from a sudden epiphany.

“Oh…” Will breathes. He reaches up to take off his glasses, picturing the dead men in front of him, their arms and legs dislocated, their hands and feet perforated, dead by strangulation. “He’s making puppets.”

Lecter perks up, watching Will’s performance.

Will’s hands go out, rising to eye-level. He sees holes in his palms, rope winding through them, leading up to a pulley system of some sort, designed to move him where he needs to go. The rope around his neck is to hold him up as he’s lifted off a stage, made to dance across it like a living marionette. It’s almost beautiful to watch.

“He’s not a sadist!” Will cries out, excited. “He’s not some religious nut-job punishing supposed wrongdoers. The holes in the hands and feet, and the dislocated limbs – it’s not *torture.* At least, torture isn’t the real purpose. He’s making their bodies more *malleable.* He’s using a rope around their necks to hold them upright, but the first two men, they must have been too heavy. That’s why he seems to show such extreme behaviour. He’s not feeling anger and then remorse. He’s trying to turn people into puppets so he can play with them, and when they *break* he tucks them away in a box like an old toy. Why would he – what would cause him to think like that?” He trails off, wondering what kind of messed up thought process would be required to do something like this.

Lecter answers, “Perhaps mental illness. Maybe a head injury, or early-onset Alzheimer’s. Widespread damage to many areas of his brain could cause a host of symptoms: amnesia, loss of inhibitions, difficulty controlling impulses, even a lack of empathy.”

Will grins at him, latching on to his ideas. “Of course! There’s something wrong with his *brain.* It’s caused him to regress to childlike behaviour. *That’s why* his profile was all over the place. He thinks he’s a kid!”

“And why would he be turning people into puppets, specifically?” Lecter asks, sliding the pictures back to Will, who picks them up without even noticing how close their hands come to touching.

He looks at them, observing all the little details. “They’re important to him,” He answers instinctively. “He grew up around them. They’re familiar, safe. Not just any puppets either. The men, two of them had their hair dyed black when their bodies were found. It’s important that they look the part, so these men…” He trails off, shuffling through the papers. “No, not just the men, a woman was kidnapped as well. The second victim’s girlfriend. She still hasn’t been found. Maybe he took them both because he thought they were perfect, but then the man died, and he had to find a replacement.”

“To what end?” Lecter prods. “What is he trying to do, Will?”

“He wants…” He trails off, feeling himself fall more into the killer’s mindset. “He needs everything to be perfect. Kids, when they play with toys, they’ll often recreate things they’ve seen in real life. He’s trying to recreate something he remembers, but…he wants to *change it.* Something terrible happened, and those puppets were there, *and they didn’t do anything!*” He stops and takes a deep breath.

“What does he *feel?*” Lecter asks. His voice is soft, but also strangely compelling.

Will doesn’t even have to think about it. “Loss. Grief. He’s grieving for something he’d forgotten he lost. He witnessed something traumatic as a child, and now, in his mind, he can change it.” He pauses again, licking his lips. “It’s going to get very bad for his victims once he realizes it won’t work.”

He finally looks up from the pictures to see Lecter staring at him openly, eyes shining with interest. “You know,” Lecter begins slowly, “there was an old puppet theater in town. It shut down a few years ago when the owner – a Mr. Adam Rain – was in a car accident that left him in a coma. When he was a child, Mr. Rain witnessed his father’s death at the hands of a robber in that very theater.”

Will blinks at him stupidly. “Where?”

“If I recall correctly, it was on West Lombard Street. I attended several performances there before my incarceration.”

Logically, Will knows that he shouldn’t jump to conclusions, but his instincts are telling him that he’s *right.*

“Thank you!” he blurts out before rushing out of the cellblock and heading for the front door, his book-bag thumping against his back. He shoves his glasses back on and pulls out his cell phone, searching through his contacts for the number Miriam Lass gave him, and calls it with shaking hands as he gets behind the wheel of his car.

“This is Agent Lass,” a voice answers, sounding distracted.

“Hey, it’s Will Graham,” he answers, suddenly feeling tongue-tied. How is he going to explain this?

“Will,” she says reluctantly. “This really isn’t a good time.”

“I think I know who’s been killing people,” he says, deciding to get straight to the point. “His name is Adam Rain. He works in a puppet theater on West Lombard Street.”

For a long moment there’s silence on the other end of the line. “Will, did Jack Crawford put you up to this?”

Will almost sputters. “What? No! Professor Crawford doesn’t know anything about this! Just – look. Rain was in a car accident that likely gave him permanent brain damage. He’s turning people into puppets. That’s why he dislocates their limbs and makes holes in their hands and feet. He needs somewhere to string the ropes through so he can move them.”

The silence is longer this time. He hears the sound of a door slamming shut on her end. When she replies, her voice is hushed and furious. “How did you know about the rope fibers? We just discovered them in the wounds of the latest victim.”

Will smirks, feeling vindicated. “I guessed.”

“I can’t go rushing off on a guess, kid. I’m sorry.”

His smirk vanishes, triumph leaving him. He scowls and starts his car. “Then why don’t you come bust me for trespassing, because I’m *this close* to going to the theater myself. You *know* he’s already found another victim, and Connie Foster might still be alive.”

“Will!” She heaves a loud sigh. “Look, how sure are you about this?”

“I’m positive,” he replies, putting as much certainty into his voice as he can.

“Fine then. We’ll check it out.” She hangs up, and Will wonders if she only said that to make him stay put.

He can’t keep himself away, punching the street name into his phone’s GPS, he gets directions to West Lombard Street and arrives in time to see the local police leading a gray-haired man out of the building in handcuffs. He looks so utterly devastated that Will feels almost guilty for turning him in.

Four groups of paramedics come out next, each with a person strapped to a stretcher. The smallest figure, a little boy who doesn’t look older than ten, is loudly complaining. “I’m fine! My dad’s the one who was shot! Don’t worry about me!”

Next to him is a man bleeding profusely out of a wound to his thigh. The paramedic is administering pressure, but he'll likely need surgery.

Will recognizes the sole woman as Connie Foster. She looks like hell. Her arms and legs are still twisted into awful positions, and she's begging for her boyfriend. One paramedic is inserting an IV into her arm, probably to give her fluids or for pain medication. Will knocked his shoulder out of its socket once during a bad fall; he doesn't want to imagine how much worse it must be for her.

The final person must be Adam Rain's final male 'puppet'. He's skinny – apparently light enough to not strangle on the ropes like the others – and his hair is dark brown. Rain must have been in a rush if he didn't take the time to dye his hair like the others.

Agent Lass spots him standing by his car and strides over, looking thrilled yet irritated by his presence. "I thought I told you I would handle it."

Will shrugs, unfazed. "I wanted to make sure you weren't just telling me that so I'd let it go." He can't keep his eyes off of Rain. The man looks so frail and small. Nothing like the sadistic murderer the press has been going on about for days.

"I wouldn't do that, kid. You made a good point. The puppet theater thing was a pretty big jump, but it makes sense once you look at all the clues." She smiles at him fondly. "You saved some lives today."

Will's face heats up. He looks down and adjusts his glasses. "Yeah, well, I had to do something."

"I'm glad you did, but don't ever threaten to put yourself in danger like that again."

He smiles back. "Thanks for listening." He turns to the theater, a faraway look in his eyes. "Did you see the performance?" he asks, mind drifting back to his vision of dancing marionettes.

Agent Lass shifts, unnerved. She gives him a searching look.

He glances at her, realizing that he's being inappropriate. Suddenly he wishes Hannibal was there. He knows the man wouldn't judge him for wanting to see. "Sorry, it's just…I wonder how it turned out." He looks down, ashamed by his own desires.

"We interrupted it. I'm not sure what Mr. Rain was expecting to happen, but whatever it was, it didn't."

Will nods sadly, not bothering to inform her that Rain had likely wanted to recreate the moment his father died. That's something that would be better shared with a therapist than a fed. "What's going to happen to him?"

She sighs. "Most likely he'll end up at the BSHCI if the brain damage made him unfit to stand trial."

He grimaces, upset by this, but doesn't say anything.

“I’ve gotta ask, how did you figure it out?” She gives him a searching look.

He isn’t quite sure how to explain what he does to her. He bites his lip and tries to come up with an answer. “I was talking to Hannibal, and it just clicked.”

Agent Lass shifts once again, unnerved by the familiarity with which Will speaks the doctor’s name. “Whatever works, kid. I’ll see you around.”

He nods, relieved, and gets back into his car to go home.

Chapter End Notes

I'm screaming internally. I can't wait to see how the rest of the fic is received.

For anyone who's curious, the episode name is "The Lesson". It's the 10th episode of season 8 of *Criminal Minds*. Just to warn you up front, it's *really* graphic. The torture is not played down, and the childlike killer only makes it worse. It also wouldn't look out of place on *Hannibal.* There's a scene where Adam Rain makes his victim dance around the stage using puppet strings, and it's as horribly entrancing as anything Hannibal Lecter could cook up, (Oh my god, I did not mean to make that pun).

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Distress

Chapter Summary

> Will realizes why Dr. Lecter helped him, and tries to deal with the fallout of Adam Rain's capture.

Chapter Notes

> Quick confession, this chapter was a lot shorter this morning. I decided I needed to add in some extra scenes. Hopefully this doesn't mess anything up, but just in case, I'll go through the rest of the story to look for any problems I might have caused.
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, February 28th – Friday, March 4th

Laying on his bed early Sunday morning, Will stares at the ceiling, tracing pictures drawn by cracks and stains with his eyes.

The rush of saving lives has vanished, and he’s starting to realize that Lecter wasn’t behaving like a sadist, that he was actively *helping* Will.

He thinks about it for a while, and something suddenly strikes him.

It makes sense to him now, why Lecter had helped Georgia Madchen, why he’d injured Mason Verger to the point where he could not harm his sister physically anymore.

“He was reacting to their *distress,*” he whispers.

It’s just another form of manipulation on Lecter’s part, to promote a sense of dependence to him, but he is aware now of a way to manipulate the man in return. Dependence is a two-way street.

He’s pleased, knowing that things have changed. Now he has a way to make Lecter give up his secrets.

By the time he gets downstairs, Beverly and Ardelia are already glued to the TV. Bev waves him over. “Dude! You gotta see this!”

He walks over, nearly freezing in place when he sees Agent Lass on the screen. She looks tired, but put together. Her hair is done up in a ponytail, and she's still wearing the same shirt and jacket as yesterday. Half a dozen reporters are calling out questions, holding up microphones to her face. One of the downsides of being an FBI agent, he supposes. Press conferences.

"*I want to reassure the public that the danger is over,*" she says, sounding mildly frustrated. "*Not dissect Mr. Rain's mind for your amusement.*"

"*But is it true he was turning people into puppets?*" one male voice asks.

Agent Lass shakes her head. "*I cannot discuss that with you.*"

"*Is his coma responsible for his behaviour? And should the public be wary of people who come out of comas in the future?*" a female voice shouts.

"*That has yet to be determined, and no, coma patients are no more likely to be serial killers than anyone else.*"

"*What's going to happen to Adam Rain? Is it true he could be cleared of all charges and released?*"

That question sets off everyone else, and it takes a moment for things to calm down again.

Agent Lass holds up her hands. "*Mr. Rain will be examined by several psychologists, but considering the danger he poses, it is unlikely he'll be released anytime soon.*"

"*How unlikely?*"

"*I'm afraid I don't know.*"

That just sets everyone off again, and Will can only shake his head. "I'm guessing politics isn't her strong suit."

"Don't be mean," Bev orders, throwing a pillow at him. He catches it before it smacks into his face and holds it up to block any further projectiles.

"It's not like *I* could do any better. I'm just saying they should have someone else answer these questions. It's a lot of pressure and she's *clearly* exhausted."

"I'm just glad they finally caught him," Ardelia says, hugging herself. "I was so *sick* of being afraid all the time. Half my classmates got into a debate about how he should be executed the same way he killed his victims. It got pretty heated. Maybe now things will go back to normal."

Will can only nod in agreement.

"*Agent Lass, a quick word. Who was that boy you were talking to at the crime scene?*"

Will's head swivels back to the screen so quickly he almost tips over. A woman with bright red hair and vulpine features has pushed her way to the front.

Agent Lass squints at her, then steps away from the microphones shoved into her face. "*No comment.*"

"*Is he the one who gave you the tip that led to Adam Rain's capture?*"

"*As I said, no comment.*" She begins walking down the steps, avoiding eye contact with everyone.

The camera focuses on the redhead again, and there's a smug grin on her face as she stares at the back of Agent Lass's head. "*Isn't it true he's the boy who's interviewing Hannibal Lecter this year?*"

Will doesn't have to be an empath to notice the way Agent Lass's shoulders stiffen before she finally makes it to a waiting car. He also can't help but see both Beverly and Ardelia turn towards him out of the corner of his eye.

Beverly clicks on button on the remote, pausing the television. "What…the *fuck?*"

He hunches, down, still holding up the pillow. "I, uh, I'm gonna go make breakfast." He quickly backs out of the living room into the kitchen, setting the pillow down on the counter.

Beverly bursts in after him, remote brandished like a sword. "Oh no you don't!" She grabs him by the collar, practically choking him as she physically drags him back to the couch.

He doesn't fight as hard as he could, but he still can't bring himself to look at them.

Ardelia reaches out to pat his hand. "So, you helped catch a bad guy? How does it feel?"

Will looks over to her, incredulous. Beverly looks much the same.

"Er, pretty good, actually," he answered, surprised into honesty.

Ardelia pats his hand again. "And you were planning to tell us over breakfast, *right?*"

He honestly hadn't planned on telling anyone, but it seems much safer to agree, so he nods.

Ardelia looks up at Beverly. "See, Bev. There was no need to manhandle the guy. Now, say you're sorry."

Beverly's mouth drops open. Her eyes dart back and forth between them before she slouches in defeat. "I…Sorry, Graham Cracker. I've got two little brothers. I'm used to shoving them around."

He blinks at her. "It's cool."

Ardelia nods firmly. "Okay, then. *You,* go cook us breakfast, and we want *details*."

Numbly, he prepares a hearty breakfast of eggs, toast, and bacon while the two girls hover in the background, Ardelia with a book in her hand, and Bev with a guilty expression on her face.

They dig in solemnly, picking at their food for ten minutes before Will can bring himself to explain what happened.

"…And then I went to the theater to talk to Agent Lass. I guess that reporter must have seen me. Maybe she was following the FBI. Is that legal?" He poses the question to Ardelia, honestly curious.

She shrugs. "As long as she wasn't interfering with the investigation, there's nothing anyone can do. She probably took pictures from her car on the street. It's skeevy, but not illegal."

"That's not the worst part," Beverly interjects, chewing on a piece of bacon. "That was *Freddie Lounds,* of Tattle Crime fame. She's vicious. I wouldn't be surprised if there are already articles on her site about you, Will."

"Oh, shit," he replies, hiding his face in his hands.

Ardelia pats his hand. "It's fine. Eventually she'll realize how boring you are and leave you alone."

"*Or* she'll break into your room to steal your underpants," Bev quips.

Ardelia nods solemnly. "That's always a risk when you're famous."

"I hate you both," he replies, voice muffled by his hands.

On Monday, Will walks to class with dread. Luckily, Bev has forgiven him, and is perfectly willing to be his human shield…in her own way.

"Mr. Graham cannot take questions at this time. If you leave your name, number, and a list of your greatest fears, he can get back to you sometime between next week and the heat death of the universe," she recites in a professional tone after a third person has approached him.

The student is left floundering in confusion as Beverly pushes him into the relative safety of Crawford's classroom.

"Will," Crawford says the moment he enters. "May I speak with you?"

Beverly already has her mouth open to respond with something snarky when Will puts his hand over it. "Can it wait until after class, sir?" he asks pleadingly, glancing over at the curious eyes of the students already in their seats.

Crawford follows his gaze. "Alright," he agrees with a nod, and limps to his desk.

Beverly takes that moment to lick his palm, and he retracts it with a grimace. "Did you just *lick me?*" he asks her incredulously, wiping it off on his shirt.

She shrugs, already heading for her seat. “Your hand smelled like lemons,” she says, as if that’s all the answer he needs.

He glares at her back. “It’s from the dish soap, and that isn’t the point.”

She grins and shrugs. “Two little brothers, Graham. And two little sisters as well. I know how to handle someone sticking their hands in my face.”

He glares at her sullenly, then turns back to pay attention to the lecture.

They’re learning about the different types of serial killers. Crawford brings up a PowerPoint of each one, with descriptions and examples:

1. Visionary serial killer

a. Propelled to kill by the voices they hear or visions they see. However, it doesn’t have to be a chronic state, they can also be lucid and aware but other times lose reality.

b. They are “outer directed” by the voices or even apparitions of the devil, demons, or God.

c. Harvey Carignan was convinced that God spoke to him, demanding that the kill young women. He believed himself to be the instrument of God doing his part to rid the world of “evil.”

d. Usually declared insane or incompetent during a trial.

e. Does not engage in any crime scene “staging,” and usually kills quickly.

2. Mission serial killer

a. Feels a need on a conscious level to eradicate a certain group of people. This person is in touch with reality and daily living, but also has a self-imposed duty to rid the world of some identifiable group of people.

b. Usually an organized non-social offender typology. Stalking, controlled crime scene and penile penetration is usually the MO for a mission killer’s crime scene.

Example: a man thought any woman walking in the streets early in the morning was a prostitute. Since it was his mission to rid the world of prostitutes, when he attacked one of them he would make them choose to have sex or to die, all of his victims were found dead. His rationale was only a prostitute would consent to sex; “good” women would rather die than to have sex with a stranger, even at gunpoint.

3. Hedonistic serial killer

a. The lust or thrill killer subtype

i. This person has a vital connection between sexual gratification and personal violence. These individuals murder because killing is an eroticized experience.

ii. Crimes are process focused; take time to complete, and including things like anthropophagy (cannibalism), dismemberment, necrophilia, torture, mutilation, domination, or other fear-instilling activates.

b. Comfort-orientated serial murders

i. Kill for personal gain (e.g., assassins killing for profit.)

ii. Type of serial killer more likely to be female.

iii. Gain is the overall purpose for these killers; these can include money or property.

c. Hard to catch, especially if geographically mobile; apprehension may be delayed for years.

4. Power-control serial killer

a. Receive sexual gratification from the complete dominance of his victim. Controlling another's life is the ultimate form of domination for many of them.

b. Has a stable mental mentality, but may have a diagnosis of sociopathy or character disorder.

c. This type of killer is aware of social and culture norms but chooses to ignore them. He lives by his own personal rules and norms.

d. Focused killings, prolong the killing scene as long as possible in order to obtain the most gratification, and also generally uses a hand on weapons but has a tendency to strangle his victims.

He tries to find a category that Lecter fits into, but has trouble seeing the doctor as someone who is compelled by fantasies or sexual urges.

In fact, he can't think of a single reason Lecter would kill, other than for his own enjoyment, and he can't help but think that it makes the man all the more terrifying.

By the time the lecture ends, Will is anxious about speaking to Crawford. As the other students file out, he hovers in the background nervously.

"You're not in trouble, Will," Crawford tells him, more reassuring than he's ever been.

"It's been kind of a rough day," he responds, eye flicking to the door just in case there are any eavesdroppers.

"I'll bet," his professor says in a low voice. "I don't want to overstep my boundaries with you, but if Freddie Lounds tries to contact you for an interview, avoid it at all cost. The less you give her to work with, the less she can hurt you."

Will blinks at him. "Okay, sir. Was that it?"

Crawford gives him a bitter smile. "Not quite. Good job on catching Adam Rain."

He blushes, ducking his head. “Thank you, sir.”

Crawford dismisses him, and he makes a hurried escape.

After his final class, he heads to the BSHCI to speak with Lecter.

It’s an impulsive decision, but one he hopes will bear fruit in the end. As long as Lecter is attempting to nourish some attachment between them, he’s leaving himself vulnerable in turn.

He’s also tired of everyone staring at him. At least at the hospital, it’s only Lecter’s eyes he has to deal with.

Will keeps an eye out for anyone with bright red hair following him as he enters the hospital. He gets his visitor’s pass from the secretary. She recognizes him by now, so she doesn’t even question his visit. He still feels like an intruder. There are no rules stating he *can’t* visit Hannibal Lecter whenever he wants, as long as the man isn't in a meeting with anyone else, but he’d rather not get into an argument with Chilton about it.

Will approaches Lecter’s cell shyly, finding the man sketching something intently. “Uh, Dr. Lecter? I hope I’m not intruding.”

The doctor looks up, momentarily perplexed. Then he smiles, clearly pleased when he sees who the unexpected guest is. “Good afternoon, Will. What brings you here?”

He rubs his sleeves between his fingertips, trying to make eye contact with the older man. “I just wanted to thank you for helping me.”

Lecter sets his pencil down, giving Will his full attention. “I take it Mr. Rain has been apprehended?”

“Yes, he has.”

“What happened?”

Will looks away, gathering his thoughts. “Rain kidnapped a little boy and his father. I think he was using them as surrogates of himself and his *own* father. There were two people strung up like puppets, just like I said. They’re in the hospital now. I’m not sure if Connie Foster will ever be able to use her hands normally again, but at least she’s alive.” He smiles, still proud that he’d helped them.

“And Mr. Rain? Did you get a chance to talk to him?”

Will shakes his head, flashing a look of disappointment in his eyes.

“He’ll probably end up in the cell next to you from what Agent Lass told me, and I’d appreciate it if you didn’t talk him into killing himself,” he says, giving Lecter a stern look.

“I would derive little pleasure from killing a man who is barely more than a child in spirit.”

Will nods, deliberately looking away.

“Right, you don’t kill children, even when they’re rude. Is there a reason for that?”

It’s a clumsy attempt, and Will knows it, but it’s all part of the game.

Lecter smiles smugly. “You’re going to have to do a lot better than that, Will.”

Will smiles, seemingly not of his own volition. “Well, can’t blame me for trying. I still have to at least pretend I’m trying to get into your head, otherwise Uncle Jack will be very disappointed in me.” His final words feel strange in his mouth, and he realizes he’d unintentionally mimicked Lecter’s speech patterns. He ducks his head, a little embarrassed, and hopes that Lecter doesn’t think he’s mocking him.

The gate at the far side of the hall opens, and two orderlies come marching down the hallway, giving him a moment of respite.

Will recognizes them, and shifts uncomfortably when he catches Matthew Brown leering at him.

“Did you reschedule your meetings?” Brown asks, leaning against the wall between the two cells. “We just need to clean out his cell. It can wait.”

Murray scowls at them both, making it clear that he does *not* share that sentiment.

Will gives Brown a pinched smile. “No, I was just getting a few things clarified. I’ll get out of your way. Uh, goodbye, Dr. Lecter.”

He makes to leave when he spots Murray’s employee pass on the ground. The metal clip is clearly damaged. He leans over and picks it up, holding it out to Murray. “Uh, you dropped this,” he stammers.

Murray grunts and snatches the card out of his hand, then attempts to pin it to his pants. The clip falls open again and he growls in annoyance. “Fucking piece of shit.”

Will glances around, uncomfortable. “Uh, maybe you could try a safety pin until you get it fixed?” he suggests, remembering his conversation with Reba a lifetime ago.

Murray seems annoyed by the unsolicited advice, but Brown vouches for the idea, saying he uses them all the time. “See?” he says, displaying the safety pin on his own card. “Works like a charm.” He winks at Will.

Murray doesn’t respond, stuffing the card into his pocket. “Whatever. Just go. We have work to do.”

Will doesn’t even bother to argue, leaving as quickly as he can. He doesn’t know how to deal with Brown’s forward behaviour, but he hopes it doesn’t escalate.

He spends the rest of the week avoiding discussions about Adam Rain, and looking into Lecter’s personal life.

He's trying to find any other details that might reveal something more about the man's character that he can exploit.

He comes up with very little, finding that the man attended charities less for the money they raised and more for the entertainment and social status they gave him. Not so different than the rest of Baltimore's Elite.

He begins to wonder if entertainment itself would be enough to get him to cooperate on some level.

His trial had certainly been one of the most interesting things to happen in Baltimore. Will remembers his father watching the news and shaking his head every time Lecter was mentioned. There were articles in every magazine, interviews with his socialite friends – with more than a few ending up requiring psychiatric care after the full extent of Lecter's crimes was brought to light. A few less scrupulous magazines had noted that eating disorders among the Elite had skyrocketed after Lecter's arrest.

Through it all, Lecter had remained unnaturally calm, smiling through his trial, reducing psychiatrists to tears, and generally making life hell for everyone around him.

It doesn't surprise him that Lecter would be willing to confess to his other crimes after so many years. The publicity from it would make the trial drag on for months, putting Lecter back in the spotlight after years of rotting in a cell. There would be interviews and psych evals and all sorts of entertainment for the man.

Briefly, Will wonders if Lecter will mention his involvement in all of it, and shudders.

It's bad enough dealing with the fallout of Adam Rain's arrest. The thought of a media circus around him, people asking him questions again and again about how he'd done it. How he'd solved the mystery of Hannibal Lecter. It leaves an unpleasant taste in his mouth. He wonders if Lecter could be persuaded to keep quiet about him. He doesn't want his privacy invaded like that.

He looks at the pictures in front of him and feels irrationally guilty. Isn't that what he's doing to Lecter now? Probing through a man's life in order to fetter out his secrets?

Lecter wouldn't care, he consoles himself. *He'd love it, knowing how hard I'm looking into him. He gets off on this type of thing.*

Will knows this is true, but he closes his laptop anyway.

By Friday, Dr. Bloom seems more at ease, so he discusses childhood trauma with her, wondering how relevant it is for his thesis.

"Trauma itself won't create a murderer, Will, or at least it's very unlikely to do so. Unless there are already underlying conditions, not necessarily antisocial tendencies, a person is more likely to become depressed or anxious than violent."

Will hopes she’s right, but he remembers seeing a list of potential risk factors for abusive behaviours, and worries because he ticks off nearly every one.

- A history of being abused or neglected as a child

- Physical or mental illness, such as depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

- Family crisis or stress, including domestic violence and other marital conflicts, single parenting, or young children in the family, especially several children under age 5

- A child in the family who is developmentally or physically disabled

- Financial stress or unemployment

- Social or extended family isolation

- Poor understanding of child development and parenting skills

- Alcoholism or other forms of substance abuse

He doesn’t like to think he condones murder, but after talking to Lecter, he realizes that if he empathizes more with the killer than with the victims, that’s exactly what he does. He recognizes the danger of this.

He can’t help but wonder if Lecter recognizes it too.

Chapter End Notes

Initially, I wasn't going to involve Freddie Lounds at all, and her part will still be minor to nonexistent, but I wanted to add in more scenes with Will and his besties. (See Critics' Choice Awards! *This* is a platonic relationship.)

And hey! You get three chapters in a row with Hannibal and Will, even though their conversation was so short this time. Yay!

Go ahead and google the different types of serial killers. It's a lot more complex than the organized vs. disorganized thing they started with way back. The Scale of Evil is pretty cool too.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Indulgence

Chapter Summary

Will tries to get closer to Dr. Lecter, and the hospital receives a new patient.

Chapter Notes

I like how this chapter turned out. I think you'll appreciate it. I hope my plans aren't too obvious, or at the very least, it's entertaining enough that you don't mind.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 8 – Saturday, March 5th, 2016

By the time Will returns to the hospital he still isn't quite sure how to prompt Lecter to respond the way he wants without using distress, but figures that getting to know the man's tastes might lend him some insight into his mind.

"So, uh, weird question. What kind of music do you like?"

Lecter pauses, looking up from his drawings to raise his eyebrows in Will's direction.

Will blushes, not needing to pretend to be embarrassed. "It's just…I've read about your, uh, what you used to do before. I mean – you went to operas and theaters. I'm just wondering if, maybe, you'd like to listen to some music sometime. I could download it to my phone."

Lecter smirks, eyes crinkling with amusement. "Are you hoping to use positive reinforcement to gain my cooperation?"

"No," he denies firmly, shaking his head. "It's just that I wanted to thank you for helping me last week." He pushes his glasses up, narrowing his gaze. "And I doubt such banal tactics would work on you, Dr. Lecter. Besides, I can figure out your secrets using my own methods."

"You sound almost arrogant."

Will smiles, leaning back in his chair and crossing his arms. "Well, considering I've learned more about you in six weeks than the world's most renowned psychiatrists have in six years, I think I'm entitled to a bit of arrogance."

Lecter nods, conceding the point. “I wouldn’t mind hearing something from my favourite composers.”

Will pulls out his phone, preparing to jot them down in his notes. “Just give me their names and I’ll see what I can do.”

“Anything by Vivaldi, Chopin, Beethoven, Bach, Handel, or Mozart would be much appreciated.”

Will nods, smiling when he gets to Mozart. “Mozart’s Requiem is one of my favourite classical songs,” he confesses, quickly typing in the names.

The doctor’s gaze sharpens. “Really? What makes you so fond of it?”

He smiles, mind drifting back. “I took a music course one summer – my dad was always trying to make me socialize with kids my age – and we watched the movie *Amadeus*. I know the film wasn’t completely accurate, but seeing the image of Mozart on his deathbed, still trying to finish the composition…I guess the meaning behind it really resonated with me. He had so much *passion* for his work that he didn’t care if it killed him.”

Will’s face reddens when he finishes, wondering if he revealed too much.

“A music course? What instrument did you play?” Lecter asks, diplomatically ignoring Will’s embarrassment.

“Uh, it was a singing class,” he admits, blushing even more and looking away. “I don’t know how to play any instruments.”

“Hmm, that is rather unfortunate. Your hands are perfect for the piano or harpsichord, though I’m sure you have a lovely singing voice.”

He shifts in his chair, ducking his face to hide his blush. “I can carry a tune, I suppose, but I’m not exactly star material. The other kids were better performers.”

“You don’t have to share something to enjoy doing it, though watching people’s reactions does have its appeal.”

Will looks back at him, eyes narrowing. “Is that why you kept such close tabs on your murders’ coverage?”

“Partially,” Lecter admits with a smile, unfazed by the change of subject. “However, it was largely to see if the FBI had any clues. Until Miriam Lass came along, they were hopeless.”

“And I’m sure you’ll never let Professor Crawford forget it.”

His smile turns feral. “Not so long as I live.”

Will sighs, switching back to their original topic. “Any specific songs you’re fond of? I’m not sure I have enough room on my phone for everything.”

“Bach’s Goldberg variations is one of my favourites. And, of course, you’ll have to include Mozart’s Requiem. There’s no reason we can’t *both* enjoy this.”

Will blushes again, ducking his head. “Uh, sure, no problem, Dr. Lecter.”

“Really, Will, after all we’ve been through together, please feel free to call me Hannibal.”

Will mulls over this for a few seconds, wondering if the man has caught on to his plan and is mocking him, or if he’s simply continuing his game of making Will dependent on him.

He decides there’s no harm in it.

“Alright…Hannibal.”

The doctor smiles, clearly pleased, and leans back in his seat, folding his hands on the desk to give Will his full attention. “Now that that is out of the way, what else is on the agenda for your visit?”

He shrugs. “Honestly, I’m pretty much winging it at this point.”

“Care to indulge my curiosity then? What music do *you* prefer, Will?”

He looks off to the side, shrugging again. “I’ll listen to anything, from classical to heavy metal. It doesn’t matter to me. My dad was into old rock, The Guess Who, The Rolling Stones, stuff like that. Bev – she’s one of my roommates – she’s into Halestorm, The Pretty Reckless, you know. Powerful female singers. I like them too.”

“Do you like them because *Bev* likes them, or because you yourself enjoy their music?”

“Does it matter?” he asks, taking off his glasses to clean off a smudge, before deciding to forgo wearing them entirely. “Either way, I still like them. Whether I’m sharing another person’s enjoyment doesn’t make a difference. The feelings are real to me no matter where they’re coming from.”

“Interesting,” Hannibal says, folding his hands under his chin. “So when you picture yourself killing one of my victims, you’re not just recreating the scene in your mind, you’re taking on my perspective. Tell me, do you feel the same things I do?”

Will stiffens. “That depends, Doctor, what did *you* feel when you killed someone?”

“Satisfaction, mostly.”

“No sexual excitement?”

“Not at all. I’m not aroused by *pigs.* Why? Do *you* feel sexual excitement when you kill?”

Will blinks. “I’ve never killed anyone.”

“In your mind, you have,” Hannibal insists.

He frowns. “That’s different. And no, I didn’t get sexually excited.”

Hannibal tilts his head, studying Will with a smile. “How is it different? You claim you like certain music because your friend enjoys it. Why is murder any different?”

“Are you equating music with murder?” he asks in disbelief.

“They can both be used to express an artistic mind.”

Will shakes his head. “Seems like you’re reaching, Dr. Lecter.”

“Hannibal, please, Will.”

“Hannibal,” he repeats dutifully.

He smiles, eyes filling with amusement. “Why the interest in sexual excitement all of a sudden?”

Will blushes and fidgets with his glasses, but still refuses to put them on. “We were discussing different types of serial killers in class on Monday. A lot of them have a sexual motivation.”

The doctor hums thoughtfully. “Sexual sadism is related to domination, a sense of ownership. By eating my victims, my dominance over them is much more secure than sexual intercourse could ever be.”

Will hesitates, then quickly glances up at the doctor. “T-Thanks. Professor Crawford didn’t really talk about that part.”

“I doubt it ever occurred to him. His interest is in catching killers, not understanding them.”

Will privately agrees, but makes a token protest, “I thought his entire job at the BAU involved understanding killers?”

“He doesn’t care about their reasons, just that they are caught. Arguably, this is why he had so much trouble finding *me.*”

“That’s…you’re probably right.” Will shifts. “Then again, you’re hardly the run of the mill serial killer.”

Hannibal smiles broadly.

“Don’t read too much into that statement,” Will warns, losing all trace of his humour.

“I would never,” Hannibal replies, still smiling.

Will scoffs. “You’re impossible sometimes, you know that?”

“I aim to please.”

The far gate opens, interrupting them, and Will's least favourite orderlies appear, escorting a new inmate.

Will double-takes, realizing that it's Adam Rain – The Marionette Man, as the press has dubbed him.

He looks away, trying not to stare.

Rain looks washed out, tired and silent. He drags his feet as he's tugged along the hallway.

Hannibal perks up, interested by the sudden activity.

"Well, well, fresh meat!" Gideon calls out mockingly.

Rain doesn't react, staring at his feet as he shuffles along.

"Shut up!" Murray orders, smashing his nightstick into the bars as a warning.

Will feels his hackles rise.

"Don't mind us," Brown says, grinning at Will and opening the cell next to Lecter. "He's here for analysis. Gotta figure out if he's nuts or not."

"I'm sure Chilton is thrilled," Will deadpans, tightening his hands into fists as Murray shoves the man into the cell with more force than strictly necessary.

"Don't cause any trouble, or I'll send you to solitary, Puppet Boy," Murray threatens. He turns away to leave without acknowledging Will, but Will catches sight of his ID tag held on with a paperclip. He frowns at the man's back, annoyed by such *rude* behaviour.

His stomach drops as he realizes what he's thinking – *how* he's thinking – and he shudders, forcing himself out of that mindset.

Brown locks the cell, checking that the door is shut tight, then unshackles Rain's hands through the bars. "Welcome to your new home. You don't bother us, we won't bother you."

Rain turns around, rubbing at his wrists and looking lost in the dingy cell. There's a bed right next to him and he sits down on it, curling up into a ball, and starts rocking back and forth.

Sympathy battles with revulsion as Will remembers what Rain is capable of.

Sympathy wins.

"Matthew," Will says, catching his attention. He stands up and walks over to the orderly.

The older man looks at him, surprised by his soft tone.

Will smiles sweetly. "Do you think you could do me a favour?" He dips his head, looking up at him through his eyelashes. He feels like an idiot, but Brown responds like a lovesick puppy.

“Anything for you, babe,” he replies, leaning against the wall with his arms crossed, subtly flexing them.

Will almost tells him to never call him *babe* again, but takes a breath and shoves his disgust down.

“Could you keep an eye on Mr. Rain? Make sure Murray doesn’t hurt him like he hurt Miggs?”

Brown’s eyes widen in surprise, and he jerks away from the wall. “Huh? Why?”

Will steps closer, reaching out to touch his arm gently, running his fingertips from the crook of his elbow down to his wrist. “He’s sick, not a monster. He doesn’t deserve to be treated badly for something he doesn’t understand was wrong.” He steps closer, lowering his voice just a bit more. “It would make me feel a lot better if I knew someone was looking out for him while he’s here.” He smiles again, as angelic as could be.

Brown caves instantly. “Sure, I can look out for him. I’m a caring guy.” He smiles back, reaching out to tuck a lock of Will’s hair behind his ear.

Will lets him, fighting down his discomfort. “Thank you, Matthew. It means a lot to me.”

“Brown, let’s move it!” Murray calls.

To Will’s relief, Brown leaves without protest, winking at him over his shoulder.

He waits for the gate to shut before letting out his breath in a *whoosh.*

“You shouldn’t let him touch you like that, Will. He might get ideas,” Hannibal says lightly, startling him. The doctor has somehow made his way to the glass without him even noticing.

Will turns around to look back at him, and is surprised to see *rage* flickering in the doctor’s eyes.

He looks down, overwhelmed by the emotion, and takes a step back. “It’s fine. I’ve taken my fair share of self-defence classes. If he tries anything, I know what to do.”

It isn’t a complete lie, even if he’d only taken classes for one summer. Still, he’s *fast,* and Brown doesn’t exactly look like a sprinter. Those muscles are more for intimidation than anything. First rule of self-defence is to run away. Brown can’t hurt him if he can’t catch him.

“If he tries to rape you, would you kill him?”

“What?” Will blurts out, staring open-mouthed at the doctor, aghast. “I – *no!*”

“I would,” Hannibal says, eyes like molten iron. He’s standing perfectly still, perfectly straight, his hands folded behind his back.

“You’d kill someone for chewing with their mouth open,” Will fires back, annoyed. “I’m not going to murder Brown for getting a little handsy. I’ll probably never speak to him again.”

“I’d prefer if you didn’t. He doesn’t deserve your attention.”

Will looks at Hannibal, trying to understand this drastic shift from his usual calm demeanor. A thought strikes him. “Are you *jealous?*”

Hannibal’s face turns to stone.

Will scoffs incredulously. “Relax, I only talked to him like that so he’d do what I want. You have my complete attention, so don’t get all huffy and take it out on someone just because I stopped looking at you for two minutes.”

Hannibal is silent for a few more seconds, and then looks contrite. “My apologies, Will. I may have overreacted.”

Will looks up, still wary. “Yeah, a little bit.”

“I’m simply concerned about your safety.”

“Don’t be. I can take care of myself.”

Hannibal looks rather dubious.

Will sighs, and rubs at his temple. “Fine, if he tries to hurt me, I’ll stab him in the neck with a pencil.”

“A pen would be more effective. A metal one, specifically. They’re less likely to snap in half, and you may need to stab him several times to stop him.”

Will smiles, amused. “Thank you. I’ll treasure that advice until the day I die,” he says flatly.

Hannibal smiles back. “You’re welcome.”

Will ducks his head, a little embarrassed by the honest emotion he sees on Hannibal’s face.

He glances at his watch. “That’s the hour,” he says, sounding regretful. “I’ll be sure to download those songs. See you next week Dr. L-…*Hannibal.*”

Hannibal’s smile doesn’t waver for a moment. “I look forward to your visit, Will. Goodnight.”

Will nods. “Goodnight.”

He turns away to leave, but catches Adam Rain gazing at him. The crushing sorrow in his eyes makes him stumble as he leaves.

He wipes his eyes as subtly as he can, hoping that Hannibal wasn’t lying about leaving Mr. Rain alone.

“Good visit, Mr. Graham?” Gideon calls out as he leaves.

Will glances at him. Gideon has been quiet for a while. He looks ready to pass out, but that unnerving grin of his is still present. “Yeah, pretty good. How are you, Dr. Gideon?”

“My head is full of cotton, and I can taste fluorescent lights on my tongue.”

Will pauses at the gate, giving him a closer look. “Is that bad?”

Gideon shrugs, collapsing back into bed with his eyes closed. “New medication side effects. Don’t worry your pretty head, Mr. Graham. At least I don’t have the runs this time.”

Will glances at the toilet in his cell. “Well, if you *do* get them, at least you’re always close to a bathroom.”

Gideon laughs once, loudly, and then falls silent. For a horrifying moment, Will wonders if he’s just watched a man die, but even in the dim light he can see Gideon’s chest rising and falling.

He flounders for a moment, wondering if he should get someone to check on him, when Gideon lets out a snore and curls up onto his side.

Will purses his lips to stop himself from smiling at the noise. There’s something…*wrong* about this situation.

He should tell someone, but he doesn’t know what to say. Maybe this is normal.

It doesn’t *feel* normal.

Reluctantly, Will goes home.

Chapter End Notes

Matthew Brown is lucky Hannibal is locked up, otherwise that boy would've lost a hand for touching Will like that.

I'm surprised how many of you liked Abel Gideon's conversations with Will. I actually added in another scene with him this chapter just for you, but I don't plan to use him much afterwards. It's all part of a grander scheme, I assure you.

Next chapter is going to be the longest one yet.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Monster

Chapter Summary

Will visits an old friend of Hannibal's and learns far more about the doctor's past than he expected.

Chapter Notes

Hey, guys! I have to get this out quickly because we're heading to my nephew's birthday party by noon.

Please forgive my (almost certainly) bad translations. I used them as sparingly as possible, but feel free to correct me if you want.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, March 6th – Friday, March 11th

Will starts to worry about the extent of Hannibal’s mindset that he’s taking on.

He dismisses the thought as irrelevant, but during Anatomy on Tuesday he finds his usual hesitance during lab is absent as they dissect a human liver.

“We should take a piece home. Fry it up with some onions,” he jibes as he slices through the organ, hands steady for once.

Bev laughs. “It does look almost good, but that’s probably because I skipped breakfast.” She claps him on the back. “You’re doing pretty well today. Guess you finally loosened up, huh?”

Will suddenly realizes what he’s doing – what he’s *thinking* – and becomes unsettled, staring down at the liver with growing disgust.

His stomach roils, but he forces himself to grin and bear it until class ends.

He wonders if this was what Dr. Bloom meant about the dangers of being Hannibal’s friend.

Will asks himself if he *is* Hannibal’s friend, and isn’t sure of the answer.

He goes searching through his research once more, trying to find any other evidence of people who were close to Hannibal before he was captured. It's more difficult than he expected. Hannibal had many acquaintances, but few close friends, and most of them have distanced themselves from the man since his incarceration.

Eventually though, he finds a picture of Hannibal and a beautiful woman named Dr. Bedelia Du Maurier on the cover of the *Baltimore Sun.*

A quick google search turns up information on Dr. Du Maurier's patient, Neal Frank, who was referred to her by another psychiatrist, and who attacked her, resulting in her having to kill him to defend herself.

Will is unable to find out anything more about Mr. Frank, but strongly suspects that Dr. Lecter had some hand in either his death or his mental decline.

He resolves to get in contact with the psychiatrist.

Finding her number proves to be difficult, so on Wednesday, Will is forced to ask Dr. Bloom if she knows how to get in touch with Dr. Du Maurier.

She frowns at him. "I'm familiar with her, to an extent. Why exactly do you need to talk to her?"

Will puts on his best poker face, reluctant to mention Hannibal Lecter. "I was reading some of her articles on empathy, especially in people diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder. Since so many serial killers fit the criteria, I figured she'd be a good primary source for my thesis." He smiles, stamping down on his anxiety.

Dr. Bloom nods thoughtfully. "Yes, she always had interesting ideas. I'll see if I can find her contact information." She opens a drawer in her desk and begins shuffling through what look like business cards.

"D, D, D," she murmurs, flipping through them until she finds the correct card, and gives Will the doctor's phone number. "Just promise not to take up too much of her time. She's retired, after all. I don't think she talks to many people anymore."

He takes the card. "Don't worry, I won't bother her for long."

Will calls her that night, and – still using his thesis as an excuse – sets up a meeting for the next day.

After class ends at 3:00, Will drives out to Dr. Du Maurier's house.

It's a quaint little home in one of the better parts of the city. Dr. Du Maurier greets him at the door wearing an elegant red blouse and a black skirt. She has a glass of wine in her hand, and Will gets the feeling that she isn't often sober anymore.

Is this what Hannibal Lecter does to people he likes?

He smiles at her, looking like an eager student meeting someone they admire. “Good afternoon, Dr. Du Maurier. I’m Will Graham.”

She gives him a nod and a tight-lipped smile, and allows him inside.

They sit on opposite sides of her living room on dark leather couches. She places her wine on the end table next to her and crosses her legs. “I hope I can be of some assistance to you, Mr. Graham. I haven’t been a psychiatrist for a long time.” Even her voice is tightly controlled, and Will wonders how he’s going to get her to crack.

They speak about her paper and his thesis, discussing the nature versus nurture debate about serial killers.

“You know, Doctor, sometimes I believe that *anyone* could be pushed into murder under the right circumstances. Of course, that doesn’t necessarily mean that revelling in killing is the same as killing in self-defence.”

Dr. Du Maurier goes silent, sensing a change in his demeanor. “What are you really here for, Mr. Graham?”

She’s quicker on the uptake than he’d expected, but he presses on. “I just want to clear a few things up about a former patient of yours.” He clasps his hands together in front of him, giving the woman his full attention. “Was Neal Frank referred to you by Hannibal Lecter?”

She stares at him, taking a sip of her wine. “I’d rather not say.”

“I’m not here to threaten or blackmail you,” he says, trying to be reassuring.

Dr. Du Maurier stiffens, “Why do you assume I feel threatened?”

“Because I don’t think the report on your patient’s death was completely accurate. I have no doubt that you felt threatened, but I don’t think it was Mr. Frank you were afraid of.”

Dr. Du Maurier is silent for another moment, then gets up to pour herself another drink. She doesn’t look at him as she begins to explain.

“He did choke on his tongue, but it wasn’t attached at the time. Dr. Lecter always seemed to attract patients with the capacity for violence. I think he liked it that way.”

“He liked to wind them up and watch them go,” Will says darkly, thinking about Miggs.

“Exactly. I don’t know why he took an interest in me.”

Will gives her a skeptical look.

“I’ll amend that. I *didn’t* know why he took an interest in me until my hand was halfway down Mr. Frank’s throat. I called him, and he helped me tidy up. Made it look like an accident.” She smiles. “I hope you aren’t planning to put that in your thesis. I’d rather not end up behind bars.”

The confession almost takes him off guard, but he'd suspected as much since he read the report. "Somehow, I doubt you'll stick around for long after this meeting, but for what it's worth, I don't blame you. Hannibal can be very persuasive."

"You speak as if you're very familiar with him."

Will decides honesty is his best bet. "I am, in a way. I've been interviewing him once a week since January for a school assignment. I also have an issue with empathy. I feel too much. I can assume his point of view, or yours, anyone's really. I know what he is, but I don't know what made him that way. I was hoping you could provide a bit of insight."

She shakes her head. "I was his therapist for over a year, until he was arrested, but I don't know him anymore than you do. Dr. Lecter always hid parts of himself away. I only ever saw his person suit."

"You should have asked him while you were *tidying up.* He might have told you."

Dr. Du Maurier looks surprised, and a little disturbed. "What makes you say that?"

Will decides to share his own insights. "He enjoys distress, but he also enjoys alleviating it, binding people to himself by making them depend on him. He's much more forthcoming with information when he thinks he can use it to influence the people he wants to draw in."

"I don't think Dr. Lecter would expose all his secrets that easily."

"Then maybe you don't realize how lonely he really is."

The words surprise even Will, and he finally understands that this is true.

Once Will was a mere irritation, then an interesting specimen, and now he's someone Hannibal feels he can relate to, perhaps the only person in the world who can understand him.

She grows still, looking at him with growing unease.

"Mr. Graham, if you want my advice, here it is: Stay away from Hannibal Lecter. Don't ever speak to him again. Nothing good will come of it. He is *dangerous.* It doesn't matter that he's behind bars, because if he gets into your head, he will ruin you."

He tilts his head, looking innocently curious. "Is that why you retired? Because you were afraid you would kill another patient?"

She looks down at her glass, swirling the wine around. "Not exactly, I was afraid he would put me in that position again, but I wasn't afraid of killing someone else. *That* is why I left my profession."

Will thinks about that for a long moment, going over her words in his head. "He's been behind bars for almost five years, and yet you're still retired."

"The fact that he's locked up doesn't change what I did, or what I'm capable of."

Will tilts his head, pinning her with his gaze. “I can see what you meant by *ruin.* You’re afraid that any action you take – running away, starting up a new practice, changing careers – that it wouldn’t really be *your decision.* He left you frozen in time. You’re terrified that your mind isn’t your own anymore.”

Dr. Du Maurier glares at him, her fist tightening around her glass. “You smug, arrogant, *twitchy* little man! You think you know what Hannibal Lecter is capable of just because you’ve spent a few weeks having some *chats?* Let me tell you what I know about his past. He *erased it.* Whatever happened to him, whatever he *did* that made him what he is, it’s buried so deep inside him that you will *never* find it. At least I hope to god you never do, because the only reason he would reveal that information is because he knows you will never breathe a word of it to anyone. He’ll make sure you take it to the grave, one way or another.”

“And what are you going to take to the grave, Dr. Du Maurier?” he asks, unfazed.

She sits back down in her chair, looking frustrated at him, at herself, at Hannibal.

“He didn’t even know I existed when he told you, so if you tell me, it’s entirely of your own volition,” he prods her gently.

She takes another drink and straightens.

“I visited him once, early on in his imprisonment. He was…pleased…to see me. I was the only psychiatrist he knew who didn’t call him a monster after our session. Even Dr. Bloom called him that once, when she realized the full extent of his crimes. He smiled, as if it was a joke between us, and said that the first time he’d been called a monster, the speaker had been an Italian police officer. I didn’t understand it. I still don’t, but perhaps you’ll figure out what he meant.”

She finishes her drink. “I can’t help you any more than that.”

Will can see that he’s worn out his welcome, and heads for the door after saying goodbye.

“Mr. Graham, one more thing.”

Will looks over his shoulder, hand on the doorknob.

“It’s been said that extreme acts of cruelty require a high level of empathy. You are not the only one trying to understand someone in your little game.”

Once he gets home, he puts the word *monster* into a search engine and translates it to Italian.

The word *‘mostro’* is the result, so Will searches for that word next, following a gut feeling.

There’s nothing important on the first page, just some songs, a design school, and some type of shoe by that name.

He frowns at the screen, going back to the translator.

“The first time he’d been called *a monster…*” he whispers to himself, and then types the two final words to translate them.

‘Un mostro’ likewise brings up nothing of interest and he grits his teeth in annoyance.

‘Mostro, Italy, police’ is what he types next, and that brings him to something new.

Il Mostro Uccide Ancora!

It’s an old newspaper, dated February 3rd, 1995, but it’s the accompanying picture that captures Will’s attention.

Part of him wonders how such a display ever made it passed the censors, but most of his thoughts have stuttered to a halt.

The article is in Italian, so Will quickly copies and pastes it into the translator. The sentences are a garbled mess, but he manages to grasp the important points.

From August, 1994, Florence, Italy had been terrorized by a serial killer called *il Mostro,* The Monster of Florence.

1994 – more than a decade before Hannibal Lecter began killing as the Chesapeake Ripper – and yet everything about this tableau reminds Will of him.

Mutilation followed by artistic posing. Extreme levels of torture, often paired with *organ removal.* Chief suspects were surgeons, butchers, anyone with anatomical knowledge.

The article helpfully informs him that the two dead figures laid out so artistically closely match a section of a famous painting called Primavera. He looks up the painting, finding his eyes drawn to the far right of it where the two models for the murdered people are displayed.

Hands shaking, he types the words *‘il Mostro, Italy’* into the search engine, finding more than a dozen articles about the killer.

He combs through them one by one until he gets to one dated just a few weeks after the Primavera murders.

There’s a picture of a tired looking bearded man with the caption reading, *Caduto in Disgrazia Agente di Polizia.*

Disgraced police officer, he translates in his head.

He puts the article through a translator, and is shocked at what he reads.

The officer, Rinaldo Pazzi, had been working on the *il Mostro* case since it began. He had apparently come to the conclusion that a young Lithuanian man was responsible for the crimes, but after police searched through the young man’s residence, no evidence was found.

That’s because it was probably in his stomach.

A month later, a French butcher was convicted of the crimes and died in prison before spring even ended.

When Will finally stops reading, it's dark out, and he's exhausted.

"Rinaldo Pazzi," he mutters. "What did you see?"

He doesn't even want to think about the long-distance charges of calling Italy, not to mention the fact that it's likely 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning over there.

Maybe there's an email address?

He searches for the name *'Rinaldo Pazzi'* adding in the keywords of *'Florence, Italy, police officer'*

He almost kisses his computer when the contact information for his precinct pops up, including his private work email.

Once he has it written down, he stops, wondering what exactly he's supposed to say.

Hey, so, you know that guy you tried to have arrested back in '95? Well, I'm pretty sure he came to America and started killing people here too. Could you maybe tell me everything you know about him so I can finish my project for school?

He mentally flinches. No, he's going to have to do better than that.

'Dear, *Signor* Pazzi,' he types, then goes back and erases the 'Dear'. This isn't a social email.

'My name is Will Graham, I am an undergraduate at the University of Baltimore, and I have recently been assigned to…' He erases the latter half of the sentence. 'One of my courses is taught by Jack Crawford, the former FBI agent who captured the Chesapeake Ripper, Dr. Hannibal Lecter. If my suspicions are correct, you will know exactly why I am telling you this. Please email me back as soon as possible.'

Is that too vague? He wonders, then shakes his head. If Pazzi can't make the connection, then he'll be of little use to him.

He shuts down his computer and goes to bed.

The sound of his phone buzzing wakes him up a little after 6:30. His alarm doesn't go off until 7:00 on Thursdays, so he quickly checks it out, pulse racing when he sees he has a new email.

'*Signor* Graham, I am very interested in what you have to say, but I would prefer to speak face to face. Do you have a Skype account?'

Will grimaces. He doesn't. He's never seen a point. His only friends are his roommates, and his dad – even before he passed away – had never bothered with computers aside from work.

Speaking of his roommates…

Bev certainly has an account. She has friends all over the world. He's seen her use it on more than a few occasions when he and Ardelia were too busy studying to hang out.

Well, she owes him for the Hobbs case.

He doesn't answer the email right away, opting instead to make some pancakes. Twenty minutes later, Bev and Ardelia stumble into the kitchen, bleary-eyed and still in their pajamas.

"Dude, do you even know what time it is?" Bev asks, collapsing into a kitchen chair. "If those aren't the best damn pancakes in the world, I'm going to bash your head in with a frying pan."

Will smirks, setting two plates in front of the girls, and handing Bev the maple syrup while Ardelia reaches for the butter.

Bev takes a bite of her pancake, slathered in syrup, and glares at him fiercely. "You're lucky, Graham Cracker," she says, digging in.

After she finishes her first pancake, he sets down two cups of coffee, each of them made to their receiver's preferences.

Ardelia gives him a suspicious look. "Okay, seriously, what did you do?"

"Nothing," he answers truthfully. "I just need Bev to let me use her Skype account."

"Oooh!" Bev squeals. "Does *Georgia* want to chat?" she asks, grinning at him.

He blinks at her, taken aback. He's hardly thought about Georgia Madchen at all. "Uh, no, it's for one of my assignments. There's someone in Italy I need to talk to."

She frowns. "Who?"

He almost doesn't want to tell her, but considering how pissed she was the last time he withheld information, he decides to stick with honesty. "He's a police officer, and I'm pretty sure he tried to have Hannibal Lecter arrested for murder back in the '90s."

Ardelia drops her fork. "What?"

"Are you serious?" Bev shouts, getting to her feet. "Are you sure he's not just a crackpot? I don't want some crazy guy Skyping me."

"*I* contacted *him,* Bev. And no, I'm pretty sure it's legit. I saw pictures of the murders. It's definitely Hannibal's handiwork."

"You can't know that!"

Will gives her a withering look. "I knew about Abigail Hobbs."

She can't argue with that.

Ardelia frowns, annoyed at being out of the loop. “Abigail Hobbs?”

“The Minnesota Shrike’s daughter, he forced her to choose his next victims, otherwise he would’ve killed her instead,” he explains.

Her eyes widen. “Holy shit,” she whispers.

“I know,” Bev says, nodding solemnly.

“So, can I use it?” he asks. “Your Skype?”

Bev looks conflicted, biting her lip and glancing at Ardelia. “I guess,” she finally says. “I’ll let you borrow my laptop during your break today at 11:00.”

He smiles at her. “Thanks, Bev.”

She sighs. “Okay, just let me show you how it works. And I want *details,* Graham.”

She logs him on to her Skype account, and Will almost groans when he sees the name he’ll be using. “The Angry Honey Badger?”

“Honey badgers are vicious creatures, Will,” she says sagely, barely restraining a smirk. “It’s the perfect way to gain his respect.”

He puts his head down on the table, already knowing he’s going to regret this.

He emails the information to Pazzi, resisting the urge to apologize for the stupid name, and tells him he’ll be free to speak at 11:00 – 5:00 p.m. in Central European Time.

Before he even gets to school, Pazzi emails him back, stating that he’ll be ready.

Will hardly pays attention during lab, but class thankfully ends before Dr. Breitkopf can call him on it.

Bev hands him her laptop before they leave. “Just have it back in one piece by the end of the day.”

He nods, thanking her again, and goes off to find a quiet place to call Pazzi.

There are more than a few isolated places on campus, but Will finds himself drawn to the bench where he and Miriam Lass ate lunch together so long ago. It’s still cold out, but he’s more worried about being overheard than freezing.

He’s sipping on a cup of coffee when the video call finally connects.

His face is lined, and his hair and beard are more gray than brown, but Will recognizes Rinaldo Pazzi immediately.

The newspaper photos had not been flattering. Pazzi has a sort of grizzled appearance that makes Will think of those hardboiled detectives on TV shows. He sits in a dark room, most

likely a study judging from the shelves of books behind him.

"*Buonasera, Signor Graham,*" Pazzi greets him. He has a soothing voice in Will's opinion, but there's something sly about him. It reminds him of Hannibal.

"Good evening, Inspector *Pazzy,*" Will greets back, trying to be friendly.

Pazzi smiles indulgently. "Forgive me, Mr. Graham, but my name is pronounced *patzy.*"

"Oh," Will replies, ducking his head. "Right. Sorry. I'm not…really familiar with Italian."

"It is fine. Now, you wished to talk about Hannibal Lecter?" Pazzi prods, raising his eyebrows.

Will nods. "Yes, I was working on a hunch…um…I've been trying to track down other murders that could be connected to him."

The investigator's eyes narrow. "And you sought me out? Why?"

Will lowers his voice, leaning in closer to the screen. "I want to talk about *il Mostro.*"

Pazzi leans back, smile dissipating. "You believe Hannibal Lecter and *il Mostro* are one in the same, no?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Why did *you* think so?"

Pazzi doesn't respond at first, closing his eyes. Will sees grief on his face before he speaks.

"I was a much younger man, but I had a talent, a *gift* for finding monsters like Dr. Lecter. That moment, when the connection is made, *that* is my keenest pleasure."

It's like his own thoughts are being spoken aloud. Will suddenly understands why Hannibal enjoys his company so much. It's gratifying to be understood so easily. He nods. "Knowing."

"Knowing," Pazzi agrees. "Not feeling, not thinking, just the certainty of understanding." He pauses for a few seconds, folding his hands on his desk. "It was his custom to arrange his victims like a beautiful painting. *Il Mostro* created images that stayed in my mind."

Will finds he can relate, thinking of Cassie Boyle and Jeremy Olmstead.

Pazzi continues. "Twenty-one years ago, I was dwelling on a couple found slain in the bed of a pickup truck in Impruneta. Bodies placed, garlanded with flowers like a Botticelli. His painting, Primavera, still hangs in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, just as it did all those years ago." He reaches down for something out of Will's sight, and holds up a picture to the camera. "That's where I met this man. The Monster of Florence."

Will stares at the picture, most likely taken from a passport or driver's licence.

It's Hannibal Lecter, looking barely older than Will. His face is still angled and sharp, but there's the softness of youth around his eyes and mouth. Will catches himself before he can reach out to touch the screen.

Pazzi puts the picture away, eyes growing distant as he begins to explain. "Success comes as a result of inspiration. Revelation is the development of an image, first blurred, then becoming clear. To find the inspiration *il Mostro* used was a triumph. I went to the Uffizi and stood before the original Primavera day after day, and most days I'd see a young Lithuanian man as transfixed by the Botticelli as I was; as transfixed as I imagined *il Mostro* would be. And every day I saw him, he would recreate Primavera in pencil, just as he did in flesh." He smiles bitterly, closing his eyes. "I knew. It was the best moment of my life, a moment of epiphany that made me famous and then ruined me."

Will nods sympathetically. "I read about it. The police searched his home, but couldn't find any evidence. Another man – not an innocent man, but innocent of those crimes – was a dream suspect."

Pazzi nods sadly. "He was convicted on no evidence except his character. My greatest mistake was allowing *il Mostro* to escape. I read every article about your Chesapeake Ripper, knowing that those people would not have died if I had been better."

"He's been locked up for years, and still the body-count keeps rising," Will says, not unkindly. "You simply made him aware that he is not untouchable. He might have even killed less because of you."

Pazzi gazes stoically at him. "You are trying to console me. Do not bother. I know what I did. Now I must ask you, why did you contact me? What did you see?"

Will doesn't need him to clarify that. "I saw a young artist, honing his craft by copying his betters."

Pazzi smiles, not at all disturbed by the analogy like most people would be. "That is what I saw too. I saw it so clearly that I could not understand why others could not. It was what helped *il Mostro* escape."

"But you were right," Will says urgently. "*I* know you were right, and I can make Hannibal admit it."

Pazzi's eyes narrow again. "And how do you intend to do that, Mr. Graham?"

Will sits up straighter. "He made a deal with me. Once I've finished interviewing him for Crawford's class, he'll confess to any crimes I can link him to," he explains. "I've already found other victims. Botticelli isn't the only person he's copied. Every once in a while, he'd pick out an interesting killer and mimic their technique, hiding his own kills like – like needles in a pile of needles."

“You believe he will honour this deal,” Pazzi says dismissively. “That is foolish. He will lie during his trial, and you will be ruined.”

“He’s already confessed to some of them – in front of three other people,” Will argues, glaring. “He won’t back out of this. He knows I’d never speak to him again, and he…he doesn’t want to risk that.” He grimaces, wondering if he’s revealed too much.

Pazzi leans back in his chair, eyes piercing. “He values your company,” he states, tilting his head. Will has never truly been on the receiving end of such knowing scrutiny. The closest he can think of is Hannibal’s ever-observing gaze, but even that seems unimpressive in comparison. “What is it about you that The Monster finds so alluring? Is it your pretty face? Botticelli himself would have surely painted you as an angel.”

Normally such words would make Will blush, but there’s something so hard and unpleasant about the way they’ve been spoken that he knows they are not meant as a compliment.

“No, Lecter loves beautiful things, but his ideal image is corrupt – tainted by blood and suffering.” He leans forward, until his face is the only thing visible on the screen. “What does that say about you, Mr. Graham?”

Will swallows, throat uncomfortably tight with some emotion he doesn’t want to name. He thinks he knows why Hannibal humiliated this Inspector Pazzi. He suddenly wonders if the grief on Pazzi’s face wasn’t there for the victims he’d been unable to save, but for the prestige he missed out on.

“If I tell Jack Crawford about *il Mostro,* would you be willing to testify?” he asks – demands, really. He doesn’t want this conversation to go on much longer.

Pazzi shrugs. “I suppose it would be my duty.”

“Think of it this way, at least now you can prove that you were right the first time.”

“And I will still be known as the man who was outsmarted by The Monster.”

“So you’ll join the same club as Baltimore’s Elite. Just be thankful you never had dinner with him.”

Pazzi smiles, that sly look in his eye returning. “I wonder if he would enjoy having dinner with *you.*”

Will disconnects the call, and then slams the laptop shut, harder than he intended. He checks it over for damage, opening it back up to see if the screen is cracked. It seems to be alright, but he starts it up again just to be sure.

It’s fine. Everything is fine. He repeats that to himself on the way to his next class, hoping that he’ll eventually believe it.

Chapter End Notes

Once again, so sorry if there are any bad translations. I tried to keep things simple to avoid that.

I love that line Bedelia says about Will being twitchy. I'm glad I found a way to include it. I hope she doesn't seem out of character. She's a hard person to read and understand. I hope I explained her behaviour sufficiently. I think she understood subconsciously that Will wouldn't sell her out if she confessed. That boy is carrying so many secrets. He's like the unofficial killer confidant.

Initially, I was going to have Will and Pazzi become friends, but the more I typed out their conversation, the more I realized the characters didn't agree with me. It's kind of sad, because the only male friend Will has is Hannibal, (and maybe Barney). Not that there's anything wrong with that. I mostly hung out with guys in college, but it is nice to have someone your own gender to talk to about more personal things.

Oh, and as for the Botticelli angel thing, I looked up a few images on google, and yeah, Hugh Dancy's gorgeous face would fit right in, especially when he had his hair long and curly.

I studied the Primavera pretty intensely for this chapter to get the details right. It's a beautiful piece of art. I'll never be able to look at it the same way because of *Hannibal,* but still, check it out.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Macabre

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal have a nice chat about art and mythology. And murder.

Chapter Notes

Hello, my lovelies. I had a lot of fun writing this chapter. Had to do a bunch of research, and I hope you'll appreciate it.

Also, I never thought of Gideon being Will's friend, but I guess he kind of is. I have a head-canon of them having a conversation where Gideon assures Will that if he ever escapes, he promises not to kill him. Will would probably reply that while that's very sweet, he still isn't inviting Gideon to Thanksgiving dinner. And then they laugh, because what else can you say to that?

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 9 – Saturday, March 12th, 2016

“Any preferences?” Will asks, scrolling through the library of songs on his phone.

Hannibal approaches the glass slowly, hands firmly behind his back, and leans over to squint at the screen as Will holds it up. “I think, perhaps, I’ll let you choose the first one. It’s been quite a while since I’ve heard any of these.”

Will bites his lip, glancing down the hallway at the other patients.

Adam Rain has joined Farley Portlock in a catatonic state, and no amount of gentle prodding has brought him out of it. Gideon’s new antipsychotic makes him listless. He sleeps most of the day, but Chilton is apparently more pleased than concerned.

Sometimes, Will really worries about this place.

Barney has already told Will that he can play anything he wants for Dr. Lecter.

“Just as long as Dr. Chilton doesn’t hear it,” the orderly had said, glancing around. “The admin doesn’t go down that hallway much anymore, and I won’t tell on you. If he asks, just play dumb.” He’d winked, and Will had grinned, feeling like he had an ally.

“Okay,” he says, hoping he won’t disturb any of the other patients by doing this, catatonic or not.

He scrolls through the list of classical songs once more, and finally settles on one Hannibal hadn’t requested. He hopes the man appreciates it nonetheless.

He sets his phone face down next to the glass and drags his chair closer to the glass.

The first notes of a violin pour out of the speaker – a bit muffled by the case – as he settles into his seat, leaning back and closing his eyes with a smile.

“*Danse Macabre?*” Hannibal questions.

Will can picture the amusement on his face. He nods, not opening his eyes. “It’s probably my favourite classical song. There’s just so much energy in it.”

“A strange thing to say of a song about death.”

“It’s not about death,” he denies. “It’s about the dead returning to life and dancing. Reanimation. Reinvigoration.”

Hannibal is quiet for a moment, listening to the music. Will continues to keep his eyes closed, watching a parade of dancing skeletons behind his eyelids as a xylophone is used to mimic the rattling of bones.

“I must admit, Will, I had not taken you for someone who would enjoy this type of music.”

Will cracks one eyelid open. “Well, I’m glad to know I’m not *too* predictable,” he says wryly.

Hannibal smirks at him. “Never.”

Will smiles, shifting in his chair and closing his eyes until the song ends. He reaches out to scroll through for the next one, but Hannibal holds up a hand, making him halt before he touches his phone.

“I’d like to talk for a while. Perhaps later we will listen to one more before you leave.”

Will looks confused for a moment. “Did you not like that one?” he asks, wondering if he was too lost in his own world to notice Hannibal’s dislike.

Hannibal smiles gently. “I enjoyed it very much. I enjoyed the way you looked while you listened to it even more.”

Will ducks his head, blushing so badly he feels his ears burn. “If you start comparing me to a Botticelli angel, I’m leaving,” he quips, and then blushes even more when he realizes what he said.

He risks a glance at Hannibal’s face, catches a flash of interest, and then recognition. His smile changes subtly, head dipping just a bit.

Will curses in his head. He hadn't wanted to reveal the discussion he'd had with Pazzi just yet. He still doesn't quite understand it himself. He just knows it left a bad taste in his mouth.

Whatever Hannibal sees on his face satisfies him enough to speak. "Botticelli, Will? My, my, I underestimated you. I didn't think you would bother to look so far back into my history."

Will glares at him half-heartedly, more annoyed with himself than with Hannibal, and gets to his feet to mirror the man's posture. "I wasn't exactly looking. I visited your old therapist, and she gave me the information I needed."

Hannibal's eyes brighten. "You tracked down Bedelia as well?"

"Dr. Bloom gave me her number."

"And how did *that* conversation go?"

"She called me a twitchy little man." Will smirks at the memory. Getting her all riled up had been surprisingly amusing.

Hannibal's smile only grows, that flash of teeth returning. "Impressive. I didn't think it was possible to get under Bedelia's skin."

He shrugs, still smirking. "It's a gift."

The doctor tilts his head. "And what did she say that helped you track down Inspector Pazzi?"

With that question, Will has no doubt that Hannibal Lecter killed in Italy all those years ago. It's horrifying in a way. Will has only gone back a few years while looking for murders linked to Hannibal, but with the knowledge that he'd been killing for *years* before he became the Chesapeake Ripper, he realizes that there could be more bodies in the intervening years.

He also realizes that he'll never be able to find them all, not unless Hannibal is willing to tell him.

"She said," Will begins, smirk fading, trying to keep the hopelessness out of his voice, "that the first person who called you a monster was an Italian police officer. A bit of translating, plus some googling, and I had a name and email address."

"Resourceful."

Will shakes his head. "Anyone could have done it."

"And yet you're the first one who has. Tell me, Will, what did you think of Inspector Pazzi?"

The younger man grimaces, rubbing at his stubbly chin. He's just starting to grow facial hair with regularity, and is reluctant to shave it off. It makes him look a bit older, less baby-faced.

"At first he seemed alright. I thought he was like me, but the more I talked to him…" He shakes his head again. He doesn't want to explain to Hannibal that he'd never realized

empathy could be used as a weapon like that. Pazzi's words still echo in his mind, making him question everything. Add in the fact that it's not too different from what Will does himself, and he's left wondering what he's truly capable of. "I don't know. I just don't like him."

Hannibal nods in understanding. "He was an insightful, cunning man. Very ambitious. His unfortunate surname made him desperate to prove himself." The doctor smirks. "Forgive the pun, but that also made him the perfect *patsy.*"

Will groans aloud, covering his face with his hands, and sits down on his chair with a *thump.* "That was horrible, even for you."

Hannibal laughs softly, and Will realizes it's the first time he's ever heard the man do so. He peeks up at him through his fingers, and finds himself smiling back unconsciously.

"I did ask you to forgive me," Hannibal reminds him.

"I don't think I can. Not for that," Will replies half-jokingly. "Murder and cannibalism are one thing, but *puns*...that's just crossing a line."

Hannibal puts on his best recalcitrant look, and Will has to smother his laughter behind his hands. He looks like a cat sitting next to a broken vase, completely disregarding it in favour of licking its paws innocently.

"Okay, seriously," Will says, suppressing the urge to laugh and sitting up straight in his chair. "You really did kill those people in Italy? You're *il Mostro?*" His good humour fades away as he stares up at the doctor's face.

"Yes," he says, as simple as that.

"Christ," Will whispers to himself, looking down at his hands. "Jesus Christ, you were just a kid."

Hannibal seems surprised by that, tilting his head and examining him with a probing gaze. "I was no younger than you are now, Will."

"I know," he says, rubbing his hands on his knees. "That's what makes it so crazy. I mean, the Primavera murders *alone* were exquisite."

He snaps his mouth shut a second after he realizes what he's just said, and is almost too horrified to look up at Hannibal again.

He remembers the conversation he'd had with Dr. Bloom, where she asked him if he was sure Crawford wasn't influencing him unintentionally. He'd denied it at the time, but now he wonders if she should have been more worried about how *Hannibal* could influence him.

The doctor hums happily, almost bouncing as he walks back to his desk. "It's so nice to have one's work appreciated, though I must admit, the fact that I modelled it after a painting makes it difficult to take all the credit."

“Yeah, well, that’s how artists grow, don’t they? By imitating the masters?” Will wonders if he should just gag himself with his jacket. His tongue seems insistent on saying the worst things possible.

Out of the corner of his eye, Will can see Hannibal smirking. “I thought of it as more of an homage, really. I’ve always had a fascination for beautiful works of art. Of course, I had a tendency to treasure those that were associated with violent acts.”

Will finally builds up the courage to look at Hannibal once more. He licks his lips, suddenly feeling parched. “Such as?”

Hannibal smiles. “I had a copy of François Boucher’s “Leda and the Swan” hanging in my dining room.”

“I don’t think I know that one,” Will admits sheepishly.

Hannibal nods. “Understandable. It is not something mass media generally exposes people to. It depicts Zeus, the Greek god in the form of a swan, approaching a resting Leda who is, of course, naked, except for a sheet draped across her stomach.”

Will resists the urge to blush, squirming in his seat. “Must have been quite a conversation starter.”

“Most people tried to ignore it, though many could not help but let their eyes stray to it again and again.”

“Well, seeing a woman getting it on with a bird isn’t exactly something you see every day.”

Hannibal’s amusement is plainly visible as he looks back at Will. “Quite right, though that particular moment has been painted many times over the centuries. It’s a rather well-known Greek myth. Zeus admired Leda’s beauty – and possibly her power, as she was the queen of Sparta – so he transformed into a swan and seduced her. Or possibly raped her, according to some modern interpretations of the story.”

“Swell guy,” Will quips.

“The Ancient Greeks would not have considered it rape. It was an honour to gain a god’s attention in such a way, even more so to bare their children.”

Will scoffs. “Yeah, sure. An entitled god shapeshifting into a bird and appearing in my bedroom hoping to do the horizontal tango. It’s like a dream come true.”

Smile still firmly in place, Hannibal leans back in his chair. “I’ve no doubt you would have gained the attentions of the gods had you lived in Ancient Greece. And had they ever existed,” he adds. “Earlier, you mentioned Botticelli’s angels.”

Will blinks and looks up at him, surprised by the sudden segue. “Um, yeah. Pazzi said something about them.” He frowns, shifting uncomfortably and crossing his arms. “Said I looked like one.”

Hannibal tsks, shaking his head. “Your appearance would shame any angel who dared look upon you. A more appropriate comparison would be to Ganymede.”

It’s a lot harder not to blush when Hannibal says that so casually. “Who?” Will asks, trying to remember where he’d heard that name before.

The doctor smiles, gaze never wavering from Will’s face. “Ganymede, the Trojan prince known to be the most beautiful mortal in creation. Zeus was overwhelmed by desire for the boy, so he transformed into an eagle and abducted him, bringing him back to Mount Olympus. Zeus granted him immortality and made him the cup-bearer for the gods, and – in some interpretations – his lover.”

Will scoffs again, brushing a lock of his hair behind his ear. “I don’t know much about Greek mythology, but I’m starting to think that Zeus had a bit of a fetish for turning into birds and raping people.”

“That does tend to be the consensus among scholars.”

Will snickers, bringing up a hand to smother it, and catches a glimpse of the time. “Our hour’s almost up. Do you want to hear another song before I leave?”

Hannibal leans back in his chair, eyes shining with just a touch of mirth as he asks, “I don’t suppose you have Vivaldi’s “La Primavera”?”

Will suddenly wishes he could wipe that smirk off Hannibal’s face, but relents with a sigh, finding the song on his phone and playing it

Within the first few notes, his ire leaves him. “Huh, I think I recognize this one.”

“That’s not surprising,” Hannibal comments, shutting his eyes. “It’s often used as background music in films.”

Will nods to himself, shutting his eyes to better enjoy the music. As the first movement comes to an end, he pauses the song. They don’t have time to listen to the entire thing.

Hannibal lets out a sigh. “I suppose you have to be going.”

“Yeah,” Will says, somewhat regretfully. “I’ll keep the music on my phone just in case you want to hear more next week.”

Hannibal smiles at him. “I appreciate that, Will. Thank you.”

“I might even download some new ones.” He turns around as he puts on his jacket. “What kind of music did you listen to in Lithuania?”

Hannibal doesn’t answer, and after a few seconds Will gives in and peeks over his shoulder.

The doctor is still, eyes distant, and with a start, Will realizes that he sees *grief* on the man’s face.

“Uh, n-never mind,” he stammers, picking up his backpack.

“*Ein Männlein steht im Walde* by August Heinrich Hoffman von Fallersleben,” says Hannibal.

Will blinks at him for a moment. “I’m…going to need you to say that a bit slower.”

Hannibal smiles gently, indulging him, and then spells the words.

“Right,” Will says when he has it written down. “I’ll see what I can do. Goodnight, Hannibal.”

“Goodnight, Will.”

With one more curious glance tossed in Hannibal’s direction, Will finally leaves.

Chapter End Notes

Ow, my heart! Why did I do that? They were having such a nice chat, and then I went and made Hannibal sad. *Ein Männlein steht im Walde* by August Heinrich Hoffman von Fallersleben is actually a really cute song, but don't worry, there are no cannibal Nazis in this fic...You ever step back and realize that you're in a fandom where cannibal Nazis are an actual thing? I don't think they're considered canon, but still.

And, yeah, Hannibal was hardcore flirting with Will, but it's just going over the kid's head. In my defence, it took around five years in canon for Will to realize that Hannibal was in love with him. Considering they've only known each other for a couple of months in this fic, I think it's understandable that Will is still clueless.

Danse Macabre is my favourite classical piece, hands down. I just love the energy, and the story behind it. It's just so much fun!

Greek mythology is so interesting. I love how the gods can be so petty and human. It makes them easier to relate to. And there are so many myths to choose from. And the art is just beautiful. I love it!

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Exhaustion

Chapter Summary

Will finds his empathy is working against him when someone's life is on the line.

Chapter Notes

Trigger warning: Suicide attempt. Just a heads up. It's off-screen, and not very detailed, but I'd rather be safe than sorry. I don't want to upset anybody, (she says as she writes a fic about a cannibalistic serial killer).

Here it is.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, March 13th – Friday, March 18th

Sunday is spent widening his search for mysteriously artistic murders that could be tied to Hannibal Lecter, and by Monday, Will is thoroughly tired of looking at dead bodies, no matter how captivating he found some of them

He lays his head on the desk in Crawford's classroom, groaning when Bev pokes him.

"Come on, Graham Cracker. Look alive. Only five more days until Spring Break."

He lifts his head in time to see a woman exit Crawford's office down the hall.

She's very pretty, but even with her dark skin, Will can see she looks pale and washed out. Her head is wrapped up in a vibrant scarf, her eyebrows are clearly drawn on.

Because of the chemo, Will thinks, realizing that this must be Phyllis "Bella" Crawford, Jack's ailing wife.

She walks slowly down the hall, hunched over a bit. Her chest is heaving, and she stops for a moment, reaching into her pocket and pulling out an inhaler.

Will looks away, feeling guilty for staring.

She's going to die soon.

Without his consent, his imagination takes over, spurred on by the hours spent researching Hannibal's possible kills, and he sees Bella Crawford lying down on an altar. Her eyes are shut, hands folded as if in prayer. She's naked, but hundreds of purple and yellow flowers cover her. Her stomach is ripped open and her intestines have been stretched and strung into the body of a harp, ready to be played.

He shakes himself out of his fantasy, trying to push down the delight he feels. He can't allow himself to think that way, no matter how beautiful she would look.

On Thursday, Dr. Breitkopf has a surprise for them in the form of a cancerous liver.

He presents it with a grin, using his scalpel to point out the cancer. "This was quite an advanced case. Seems like there's more tumour than liver, wouldn't you agree?"

It's unpleasant to look at, and he can see why Garret Jacob Hobbs had no interest in eating something like that. It's covered in yellow and white blotches that just don't look healthy.

He frowns. What would even happen if someone ate a tumour? Would they get cancer? He's pretty sure it doesn't work that way, but he finds his hand in the air almost before he can stop himself.

Dr. Breitkopf is surprised. It's the first time Will has asked a question in his class. "Yes, Mr. Graham?" he acknowledges, pointing at Will with his scalpel.

He knows before he even opens his mouth that this isn't going to go over well with Bev. "Uh, I was just wondering…what would happen if someone *ate* a tumour?"

Half the class turns to stare at him, while the other half whisper to their neighbours, asking what he said most likely, and that sets off a whole chorus of susurration that makes Will want to crawl under his desk and die.

Dr. Breitkopf, on the other hand, looks thrilled. His eyes shine as he clears his throat loudly, gaining everyone's attention. "An excellent question, Mr. Graham!" He sets down his scalpel and claps his hands, gaining everyone's attention. "Well, can anyone answer it?"

Nobody responds. A few people shuffle through their textbooks half-heartedly, but none of them speak up.

Dr. Breitkopf looks disappointed. "Alright then, let's break it down. What *is* cancer?"

Bev's hand goes up. Dr. Breitkopf points at her, a smile on his face.

"Cancer is…well…it's technically the catchall term for when a person's cells start growing out of control, taking energy from healthy cells and multiplying rapidly, which forms tumours."

"And would ingesting these tumours transmit it to someone else?"

"Um…no?" Bev answers hesitantly.

Dr. Breitkopf nods. “You’re mostly correct, Ms. Katz. If ingested by someone with a healthy immune system, most cancerous tumours would be identified as a foreign agent and destroyed before they could spread. If, however, the tumour carries a virus that *causes* cancer, such as the human papillomavirus, and if this virus somehow made its way into your bloodstream, say, through a cut in your cheek or an ulcer in your stomach, then there is a possibility that cancer could be spread that way. Does that answer your question, Mr. Graham?”

Will blinks rapidly and nods his head, satisfied by the answer and hoping to move on.

Dr. Breitkopf smiles at his students. “Just to be clear, please don’t eat the tumours. I don’t even what to contemplate explaining such a thing to the dean.”

That gets a laugh, and class continues without incident.

On Friday, Will is working on his thesis in Dr. Bloom’s office when there’s a knock at her door.

Dr. Bloom frowns. “I’m not expecting visitors. Just give me a few minutes, Will.”

She rises from behind her desk and opens the door. “Bella!” she cries, smiling with genuine affection. “This is a surprise. Come on in. Take a seat.” Dr. Bloom leads the frail woman to the sofa and sits down next to her.

“I didn’t know you were busy with a student,” Mrs. Crawford says as she spots him hunched over his laptop in the corner of the room. “I can come back later.”

“Will?” Dr. Bloom asks. “Are we going to bother you?” He can tell she’s hoping he’ll say no.

He smiles at them both. “Oh, I’m fine. Don’t mind me.” He pulls out a pair of headphones and places them in his ears, but doesn’t turn his music on. Something is telling him to pay attention to Mrs. Crawford.

“I’m so glad you dropped by,” Dr. Bloom says. “I haven’t seen you in ages. How are you doing?”

“I’m holding up,” she says weakly. “How’s your baby boy, Marquise?”

“Spoiled rotten,” Dr. Bloom replies with a sigh. “I can’t blame Margot too much either. Considering all we went through to have him. Well, he’s going to have a much better life than she did, that’s for sure.”

“With the money she has, it’s a wonder why you bother working when you could stay home with them.” There’s a note of bitterness in the woman’s voice that Will can’t quite decipher. Is she angry that her husband can’t afford to be by her side, or is she angry at herself for wanting him to be?

“I love my job. I love my students.” Dr. Bloom tilts her head in his direction, but he pointedly ignores her, mouthing the words of the article he’s pretending to read. “Some more than others. Will is a really good kid.”

He has to fight down the blush, knowing it would give him away. He knows he shouldn't be eavesdropping like this, but he can't stop himself. There's just something…not right about Mrs. Crawford.

The woman in question smiles gently. "I think Jack's mentioned him. He's some sort of profiling prodigy. Even managed to make Hannibal Lecter talk."

Dr. Bloom grimaces. "Yes, well, as long as Hannibal isn't messing with his head to make him hurt himself, I guess I can't argue against their meetings."

She twitched, Will realizes, suddenly feeling overwhelmed by something he can't name. *When Dr. Bloom mentioned me hurting myself, Mrs. Crawford twitched, like she'd been caught in a lie and tried to prevent a reaction.*

"Well, if he's as smart as Jack claims, maybe Hannibal just enjoys his company?"

Dr. Bloom looks like she wants to argue that, but Will chooses that moment to scroll through his phone, pretending to look for a new song.

"I should get going now. I'm feeling a bit worn out," Mrs. Crawford says. She reaches into her pocket and pulls out a blue, velvet box. It's the kind that holds jewellery. "I just wanted to drop by to give you this. I was cleaning out my old jewellery box and I realized I've never actually bothered to wear this. It'll go well with that blue dress of yours."

Dr. Bloom pushes it away. "Oh, Bella, I can't."

"Please," Mrs. Crawford says, almost pleading.

Dr. Bloom takes the box reluctantly and opens it. "Oh! Are those real sapphires?"

"That's what my aunt told me when she gave it to me. I'm not sure if she was telling the truth, but it *is* a beautiful necklace. I can't see myself wearing it now."

Dr. Bloom bites her lip. "Well, if you're sure. I'll have to get you something nice for your birthday."

Mrs. Crawford waves her off. "There's no need for that."

"Don't be silly. This is beautiful, Bella. Thank you so much." She reaches out and hugs the other woman, careful not to dislodge the scarf wrapped around her head. "Are you going to stop in to see Jack?"

Mrs. Crawford shakes her head, looking down. "No, I already said goodbye. I think I'll go home and rest for a little while."

Dr. Bloom gets up first, holding her arm out for Mrs. Crawford to take, and walks her to the door. "Do you want me to take you to your car?"

Mrs. Crawford smiles painfully. "No, I'm fine. It was wonderful to see you, Alana. Say hello to Margot for me." With that, she meanders down the hallway, breathing heavily all the

while, but still pressing on.

Dr. Bloom watches until she's out of sight, a mournful expression on her face.

"Did she seem alright to you?" Will asks before he can help himself. He wants her to have noticed as well. He wants her to stop Mrs. Crawford, to call her back before she does something terrible.

"Hmm?" Dr. Bloom replies, looking over at him with confusion. "What do you mean?"

He ducks his head. "I just thought she seemed tired."

"She's very ill," Dr. Bloom says, closing the door. "It's not surprising. She's a strong woman, though. She'll get through this."

Does she want to? Will thinks, but doesn't say.

The nagging sensation that he should do something follows him all the way to Crawford's class, and by the time he arrives he's a mess.

He's the first one in the classroom, aside from Professor Crawford, and when he sees the man he knows he has to do something.

"Professor Crawford?" he says, approaching hesitantly. How long has it been since Bella Crawford left? Is it already too late? Is he wrong about what she's planning to do?

"Will," Crawford acknowledges, not looking up at him just yet. He's shuffling through some papers for today's lesson.

"I think you need to go home to your wife," he sputters urgently. He flushes when Crawford looks back at him.

"Excuse me?" his professor replies, eyebrows raised questioningly.

He gulps. "Your wife came to visit Dr. Bloom today, and I think she's going to hurt herself."

Crawford turns around to face him, papers forgotten. "I'm sorry, *what?*"

"She gave Dr. Bloom an old necklace, and she just seem so *tired.* I don't know." He shakes his head. "Can you at least call your house to check on her?"

Crawford looks at him for a long moment, then pulls out his cellphone. Will listens with bated breath, but he can sees from the growing unease on his professor's face that there's no answer.

"I'm going to call our neighbour, just to check in. Bella might have taken some sleeping pills," he rationalizes.

Will bites back the urge to tell the man to call an ambulance. He doesn't want to look like an idiot if he's wrong.

But I'm not *wrong! She's going to kill herself!*

His anxiety ratchets up when the neighbour calls back just a few minutes later. Will can hear her distressed voice through the phone, and Crawford pales, mouth dropping open. "Call an ambulance!" he orders. "Ask the operator what to do! I'll be there as soon as I can." He hangs up, leaving his notes on his desk, and hobbles to the door. He looks over his shoulder at the last second. "Tell everyone that class is cancelled. Indefinitely."

Will nods dutifully, happy to help in any way. He stands by the door, letting his classmates know that Crawford had a family emergency and they can go home early. Most of them are pleased, eager to get started on their week off, and don't ask questions.

Beverly catches on immediately. "Something happened," she says when the last students have gone. "You look like you're going to collapse."

Will almost does, leaning against the wall and putting his hands over his face. "Mrs. Crawford tried to commit suicide."

"What?" she hisses, looking around. "Who told you that?"

He shakes his head. "I'm the one who told Professor Crawford. She came in to visit Dr. Bloom, and I just *knew* something was wrong."

"What, like with your," She waves her hand in his direction. "thing?"

He nods, rubbing at his temples.

"Whoa!" Bev breathes. "That's…whoa. Is she still alive?"

He shakes his head. "I don't know. I hope so. I should've told him sooner. He had a neighbour call an ambulance, but I just don't know."

"Hey," she says, reaching out to hug him. "Don't be like that. You did good, Will."

Will accepts the hug, and tries not to wonder whether Bella Crawford would have agreed to let him decorate her body like in his fantasy. He thinks she might have appreciated him making her look beautiful one last time.

Later that night, Will gets an email from Jack Crawford thanking him for saving Bella's life. He barely manages to finish reading it before he shuts his computer down.

He collapses facedown on his bed, trying to work through what Mrs. Crawford must have felt when she found herself being resuscitated by paramedics.

Anger. Misery. You ruined everything!

He presses his hands over his ears and curls up under the covers, letting guilt wash over him until he finally drifts off.

Chapter End Notes

I hope that was okay. I'm not just doing this on a whim. There's a very important reason for Will saving Bella, (aside from the fact that I love her character). You'll see what I mean next chapter.

Also, please don't eat tumours. They probably taste nasty anyway, and it's basically cannibalism.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Comfort

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal gives Will an impromptu therapy session when it becomes clear that something is weighing on the younger man's mind.

Chapter Notes

> Sorry this is a few hours late. I went shopping again. Bought a whole bunch of new clothes. My new glasses still aren't in, but hopefully they will be by Saturday.
>
> I think this is one of my better chapters. I put a lot of work into it. I'm just hoping I don't make anyone cry.
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 10 – Saturday, March 19th, 2016

His sleep is anything but restful, and by the time he gets to the BSHCI, he feels ready to collapse. Dark circles sit heavily under his eyes and stifles a yawn as he sits in his usual chair in front of Hannibal's cell.

"Are you alright, Will?"

He nearly jumps out of his chair at the sound of Hannibal's voice, realizing he'd almost nodded off. He groans under his breath and brushes a hand through his hair. "Would you believe me if I said yes?" he asks without much hope, giving the doctor a lopsided smile.

Hannibal doesn't return it. "How did you sleep last night?"

"Who needs sleep? I'll sleep when I'm dead."

The doctor frowns. "You shouldn't neglect your health. Were you having nightmares?"

He shakes his head. He hadn't slept long enough to dream. "I just had a coffee. The caffeine will kick in any minute. Besides, I'm on break. I'll have all week to catch up."

"Would you like to talk about what's troubling you?" Hannibal asks.

Will looks up, seeing him sitting behind his desk, hands and legs folded. He mimics the posture without thinking. “Sometimes I forget you were a psychiatrist.”

“I still am, technically. My diplomas are still valid despite my incarceration.”

Will snickers. “Bet you *love* throwing that in Chilton’s face. You’re definitely more qualified for his job than he is.”

“You’re avoiding the question, Will,” Hannibal replies steadily.

Will glares at him half-heartedly, then sighs and slumps in his chair. “Jack Crawford’s wife tried to commit suicide yesterday.”

Hannibal mulls over this for a moment. “Jack Crawford is not one to tell his students such intimate details about his private life, no matter how much he favours them. How did you come by this information?”

He sighs, rubbing his face. “I’m the one who realized what she was planning to do. She came to visit Dr. Bloom while I was working on my thesis. She gave Dr. Bloom a necklace, and talked about saying goodbye to Professor Crawford.” He pauses before divulging the last clue, wondering if Hannibal would be offended or amused. “She also twitched when Dr. Bloom mentioned that she was worried you were going to talk me into killing myself.”

Hannibal tilts his head, not visibly reacting to that. “Did they not realize you were listening?”

Will pulls his headphones out of his jacket pocket. “I pretended to listen to some music.”

“Very deceptive.” He sounds almost proud, and Will crosses his arms defensively.

“I wouldn’t have done that if I wasn’t worried about her.”

“What made you worry?”

Will looks away, frowning. “I don’t know.”

Hannibal arches an eyebrow. “I can’t help you if you lie to me, Will.”

He flinches, worrying at his bottom lip for a moment before meeting Hannibal’s eyes steadily.

“I knew she was suicidal from the moment I saw her in the hallway on Monday, and I didn’t say anything until it was almost too late.”

He shudders, feeling somehow unburdened now that he’s shared that.

“Why didn’t you?”

Will smiles painfully, rubbing at his stubble as he stares up at the ceiling. “I could see how tired she was. She’s been fighting for so long. She just wanted it to be over. And I took that

away from her." He laughs bitterly. "I got too lost in her head, and that's not even the worst of it. I mean, how am I supposed to stop killers if I can't help but see their point of view?"

"You caught Adam Rain," Hannibal reminds him.

Will looks over to the cell next to them. Rain is curled up on his side, staring blankly at the wall.

He has to look away. "Agent Lass caught him. All I did was make a call," he argues.

"Now, Will, we both know you did a lot more than that," the doctor chastises gently.

Will looks up at him imploringly, and lowers his voice, though no one in the hall is aware enough to listen in. "I don't think I would have stopped him if I'd gotten to the theater first," he confesses. "I think I would have just stood there and *watched.*"

Hannibal meets his gaze unflinchingly. "Then perhaps behavioural sciences is not suitable for you," he states sensibly.

Will scoffs, breaking eye contact. "More like *I'm* not suitable for behavioural sciences."

"If you don't feel you can handle it, why not go into psychiatry?"

"And if I have a patient who wants to commit suicide, and I get so submerged in their head that I can't think of a reason to stop them?" he retorts, glaring at the doctor.

"You stopped Mrs. Crawford."

"Yes, but it isn't the same. She wasn't confiding in me for weeks or months on end, until I couldn't help but see her point of view. I just saw her in passing a few times – while she was saying goodbye – and it hit me. The longer I'm around someone, the worse it gets." He rakes a hand through his hair in frustration. "How am I supposed to do my job if my patients believe the only way they'll solve their problems is by dying, and I can't help but agree?"

"Comfort yourself with the knowledge that most suicidal people are grateful when their attempts fail."

He pulls at his hair. "Mrs. Crawford wasn't grateful. She nearly decked the paramedic who resuscitated her." It was a tidbit of information that Crawford had given him in his email, possibly to add some levity to the situation. It just made Will feel worse.

Hannibal smiles. "So she still has some fight left in her."

Will scowls at him. "It doesn't matter if she has all the fight in the world left in her. The only thing she has to look forward to now is a slow, painful death. I couldn't even let her die with dignity."

"Is it dignified to take oneself out of the world so clinically? To weigh the pros and cons of living another day? We're all dying, Will. Just because the doctors have given dear Bella a more clear-cut time limit than you or I doesn't mean anything. She could choke to death on

her next meal, or get an infection from an IV and die a week later. She may even go into remission and live another thirty years, forever waiting in agony for the doctors to tell her when her number will be up. It doesn't matter how we choose to die. What matters is how we choose to live."

Will takes this in, still defiantly clinging to his guilt. "That would be almost inspirational if you hadn't chosen to live as a serial killer with a taste for long pig."

Hannibal smiles again. "It's true. I would not have been pleased to die at Ms. Lass's hands, but I would have died with the knowledge that I had led a pleasurable life. My only regret would be never having the chance to meet you, Will."

Will blushes, turning away. "Well, you're not so bad yourself when you're not threatening to eat my brain."

"I assure you, Will, if I ever decided to eat you, I wouldn't stop at your brain."

He snickers, looking back at Hannibal with a teasing smile. "You'd honour every part of me? Careful, Doctor. People will say you're in love."

Hannibal smiles, but swiftly changes the subject. "As for your concerns about empathizing too strongly with your patients, perhaps you should try another branch of psychology? Would research be less trying on your mind? It would mean less exposure to unstable individuals."

Will shakes his head. "I don't want to sit in some office reading second-hand reports and making graphs and pie charts about mental illness. I want to help people become better."

"Well, forgive me if this seems out of line, but perhaps you could try teaching? Nothing betters a person more than a good education."

Will snorts. "What? Those who can, do; those who can't, teach?"

"Well, if you truly believe you *can't,* wouldn't you feel better knowing that you could be nurturing the minds that *can?*"

He sighs, scuffing his shoe on the ground. "I don't know. I don't think I'd like that either, living vicariously through others. Makes me think of those soccer moms and dads who take the credit when their kid scores the winning goal."

"Well then, I'm going to sound terribly cliché, but the only other piece of advice I can think to give you is to get to know yourself."

Will looks up, confused. "What?"

Hannibal smiles at him gently. "Perception is a tool that's pointed on both ends. You feel others' emotions as if they are your own, mimic their speech patterns and body language unthinkingly. You can see into the minds of the most depraved killers and understand their motives with perfect clarity. Yet, for all your insight into others, you lack true awareness of who *you* are. Your empathy may impede your ability to perceive your sense of self, but I can assure you it's there. I've seen it come out more and more the longer we've spoken. Once you

understand what you're made of, Will, then you'll never have to fear that you'll become lost in someone else's mind again. Believe me, you're the most stubborn man I've ever met. If you truly desire to become a clinical psychiatrist, or a forensic psychologist, I have no doubt you'll find a way to make your empathy work for you. And I agree, your mind is far too valuable to allow it to stagnate in a classroom. No one will ever truly understand people the way you do. I'm sure you'll make the right decision for yourself."

Will is silent for a long time. "And if I find I don't like who I am?"

Hannibal shrugs, making the motion look so casual and smooth that Will is reminded of just how cultured the man is. "Change what you can, and learn to accept what you can't. It's your mind, Will."

He laughs softly, closing his eyes and shaking his head. "You're right, that *was* terribly cliché," he says, then smiles at the doctor, making eye contact with ease, "but thank you. It made me feel a bit better, at least."

"Then allow me to continue. Bella will recover from her suicide attempt. She will have good days and bad days. Eventually she will die, but part of her will be grateful for those extra days you gave her. I'm sure Jack will be grateful as well." Hannibal's lip turns up into a sneer, as if offended by speaking his name.

"I didn't do it for Professor Crawford."

Hannibal tilts his head. "Then why did you do it?"

Will folds his hands in his lap, looking at them intensely. "Because…it just didn't seem right to let her die like that. She…I only saw her for a few minutes, but I *liked* her. I don't know what I would've done if I hated her."

"That's something you need to learn about yourself, then. I wish you the best of luck in this endeavour."

Will can hear his sincerity, and even if it's faked, which he doubts, it's uplifting. "Thanks. I'm starting to see why so many of your patients liked you."

Hannibal smiles. "Do you feel like my patient?"

Will smiles back. "We're just having conversations. Nothing more."

"Hmm, that's true. How *is* Jack handling this, by the way?"

Will sighs, running a hand through his hair again. "Judging from the email he sent me, he's torn between gratitude to me for figuring it out, and self-loathing for not seeing it himself."

"Must be quite a blow to his ego."

"It is. Once the shock of almost losing his wife wears off, he'll probably start thinking that he's lost his touch, that if he can't even tell when his wife is thinking of killing herself, how is he going to convince the FBI to let him back into the Behavioural Sciences Unit?"

“You make him sound so callous,” Hannibal tells him, smiling.

“He is,” Will asserts. “And he’s selfish, and manipulative, and if he wasn’t doing it to help save lives, I’d call him a psychopath.”

“The line between psychopathy and altruism is much thinner than the masses like to believe. Jack is not above breaking the rules for the greater good, and feels no remorse for any of these actions as long as he believes he has done the right thing.”

“Like the way he caught you?” Will prods. “He broke all sorts of rules, but as long as you’re behind bars, he feels his actions were justified.”

Hannibal smiles, teeth glinting. “Precisely. One has to wonder how he would feel if Miriam Lass had died in their attempt to apprehend me.”

“Guilty,” Will answers immediately. “But he would do it again in a heartbeat if he thought there was a chance it would work.”

“You know him so well.”

“I don’t really have a choice.”

“Don’t you?”

Will shrugs. “With the way my empathy works, I feel like I know everyone, whether I want to or not.”

“It must be difficult to keep it all organized, never knowing for sure whether something you feel is due to outside influences.”

He looks away. “Yeah, well, I’ve coped this long.”

“You coped by isolating yourself at a young age. You have an incredible mind, Will. It would be tragic if you had to hide yourself away just to maintain your sanity.”

Will looks at him closely, squinting as he tries to decipher the man’s expression. “Do you have some ideas you’d like to share, Doctor?”

Hannibal smiles patronizingly, as if Will has just caught on to something that should be obvious.

“Have you ever heard of something called the *method of loci,* also known as a memory palace?”

“Uh, I think I saw something like that on *Sherlock.* He used it to help him remember things or something,” Will replies, remembering how Bev and Ardelia had pestered him into watching the first two seasons back in their first year of school. “He called it a mind palace.”

The doctor seems amused. “Indeed. It’s a mnemonic device which uses visualization to organize and recall information, but it can be so much more than that. All you need is a good

imagination, and you can create entire *worlds* in your mind."

Will has to admit that his interest is peaked. "Is that something you use in here, Hannibal?"

Hannibal smiles ruefully. "It does help to pass the time when I can visualize myself in an audience listening to *Vide Cor Meum* instead of Chilton's prattling."

Will is unable to stop himself from snickering. "Okay, you've sold me. How does it work?"

"The simplest way is to picture a place you know well, like a childhood home. Once you have that imprinted in your mind, you can begin filling the rooms with things you want to remember, or if you'd prefer, things you want to forget. Once you begin associating memories with specific rooms, it becomes easier to recall them."

Will sits back. "Sounds interesting, but how will that help me?"

"I would think that it's obvious. Your problem is that you get so engulfed in other people's minds that you have trouble remembering who you are. If you filled a room with all the things that you know are important to you – what makes you Will Graham – you would not be so vulnerable to outside influences."

He frowns. "So, what? You want me to compartmentalize?"

"That's a rather simple way of putting it, but yes. I think it would be very beneficial to you."

Will sighs. "Alright, I'll try." He glances up at Hannibal. "Think you could talk me through it a bit?"

Hannibal practically beams. "I would be delighted." He folds his hands neatly on his desk. "It helps if you close your eyes."

Will does so.

"Now, picture somewhere you know well. It doesn't have to be a large building to start with. Just a room will work for now. You can build on it over time."

It takes Will a moment to come up with a place, but when he does, he smiles wryly. "I'm picturing the hospital."

With a smile in his voice, Hannibal says, "Not the first place I'd choose, but to each his own. Now, in your mind, I want you to walk through the building. Look into the rooms. Get a real feel for this space."

Will nods, entire body relaxing under Hannibal's dulcet tone. He walks down the familiar hallway, looking into the now empty cells in his mind. He bypasses the first security station, going down another long hallway until he reaches the employee lounge. Passing through another security station, he sees Chilton's office, his name displayed in gold lettering. He sneers. Pretentious.

"Where are you, Will?"

“Outside Chilton’s office,” he answers. His hands grip the seat of his chair in the physical world. Without even thinking about it, words come bursting out of his mouth. “I hate him. I hate him *so much.* He doesn’t care about anyone but himself. He’s a narcissistic asshole who can’t even do his job.” Will grinds his back molars, feeling anger bubbling up from some unknown source. “I’d like to rip his fucking throat open and pull out his tongue.”

Will’s eyes spring open, shock coursing through him as he realizes what he just said.

Shaking and sweating, he jumps to his feet. “This isn’t working. I should – I’m going now.”

He risks a glance at Hannibal’s face, and his stomach clenches when he sees the rapturous look in the doctor's eyes.

“Keep working on it at home, Will. I’m quite eager to see what you accomplish by next week.”

Will just nods, not able to speak, and picks up his jacket and backpack.

He races out of the building, trying to push back the elation he felt when he pictured mutilating Frederick Chilton.

He really needs a break.

Chapter End Notes

Quick confession - my mother died of breast cancer when I was eighteen. She was sick for years, but she never stopped fighting to live another day until the end. If she had given up when she was first diagnosed, she never would have seen me grow up, or been able to hold her first grandchild. I sort of used my own experiences for this chapter, but I don't want to speak for anyone who's dealing with a terminal illness. I learned about euthanasia and assisted suicide in my ethics class, and I know that a lot of people have conditions that will disable or kill them even with modern medicine advancing as quickly as it is today. I'm not sure what I would do if I was diagnosed with cancer or multiple sclerosis or Alzheimer's. It's something you don't really want to think about until you have no choice.

Just, remember this: My mother was told she had one year to live, and she survived twelve.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Oh, and happy Spacedogs Week!

Break

Chapter Summary

Will visits Beverly's family. Everything is beautiful and nothing hurts.

Chapter Notes

Alternative Chapter Title: Will Graham Has A Nice Time

You may or may not have noticed this, but I changed the rating, and added a new tag. As several commenters have pointed out, they mostly read fics with a bit more smut, and I'm grateful that they took the time to read my fic, which so far has been smut-free...

Until now! (Dun dun dunnn!)

I was initially going to wait for the sequel to add in some sexy times, but since you've all been so wonderful - putting up with my rants and complimenting me on my knowledge - I decided to give you guys a bit of a reward.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, March 20th – Friday, March 25th

For Spring Break, Beverly invites Will to spend the week with her family in New Haven.

Will reluctantly goes, thinking that perhaps a change of scenery would be helpful.

“Just to warn you, my family is huge. Like, I’ve got two little brothers, and two little sisters. They’re all off school, so be prepared to be surrounded by kids all day.”

Will groans. “Great.”

They each take their own cars, only stopping to chat during bathroom breaks and a quick trip to a fast food joint.

Will spends the long ride listening to a mix of the music he’d played for Hannibal, finding he’s growing fonder of them with each passing day.

Maybe I’ll look up a few operas when I get back. It couldn’t hurt.

They arrive, and Will gapes at the huge house in front of him.

Will was always peripherally aware that Beverly came from a rich family, but standing in front of a three-storey manor that could easily dwarf their house in Baltimore he's reminded once more just how different their backgrounds are.

A younger, round-faced teenager runs out of the house as they pull up, and Beverly gets out of her car to greet her with a hug and a cry of, "Vicki!"

The two girls jump around, still hugging each other, and Will is momentarily overwhelmed by their love for each other. It's a nice feeling, but not one he's had much experience with. His father had rarely instigated any physical contact, at least not while sober, and Will always hated the cigarette smell that clung to his clothing. Hugging was something he endured while holding his breath, not something he sought out.

The teenager, Vicki, spots him, and her brown eyes widen comically. "Mom! Bevvy brought a boyfriend home!"

"He's not my boyfriend!"

Will blushes, grabbing his luggage from the backseat.

The two sisters carry Beverly's luggage to the door where they're greeted by an older couple.

The couple reach for the suitcases and tote-bags, giving their daughter a hug with their free arms, and Will suddenly feels horribly out of place.

"Hey, this is Will Graham, the guy I told you about. He's the reason I'm passing Crawford's class," Bev announces, gesturing to him as he stands in the front yard.

"Well, invite him in, Birdy."

"Mom!"

Beverly runs over to him, grabbing his arm and pulling him into the house. "Don't be shy. They'll love you," she whispers to him.

Two boys come downstairs, both in t-shirts and jeans.

A much younger girl prances into the hallway wearing a pink ballerina dress, holding a plastic scepter with a crown on her head.

"Chloe!" Beverly cries, sweeping the little girl up. She turns back to Will. "Okay, so, introductions. These are my parents, Charles and Julie Katz. That's my younger sister, Vicki. She's seventeen. This is Chloe. She's six. And my brothers are Seth and Luke. Seth is fourteen, and Luke is nine."

"I'm ten!" Luke corrects indignantly. "You missed my birthday."

Beverly frowns to herself. “Oh, right, I did. Well, I’ll have to buy you something while I’m here.”

“Don’t spoil him, Birdy,” Mrs. Katz scolds. “He has enough presents.”

“But he’s my baby brother!” Bev insists, smirking at her. “What kind of sister would I be if I didn’t show him how much I love him by spoiling him rotten?”

Mrs. Katz rolls her eyes. “There’s no arguing with you.”

“Honestly, you guys are lawyers. Shouldn’t you be good at arguing?”

The easy camaraderie makes Will smile.

He sets down his luggage to shake Mr. Katz’s hand. The man is a few inches shorter than he is, and he finds himself hunching down a bit to greet him. “Thank you for letting me visit, sir.”

Mr. Katz smiles faintly. “Think nothing of it. Beverly told us that your father passed away last year. We would have invited you for Christmas if we’d known sooner.”

Will glances down, feeling vaguely uncomfortable at the notion that Beverly talked about him with her parents. Will never really spoke much with his father after he left home. Aside from car engines, they had little in common anymore. He’d returned home during the summer and winter breaks, but they’d spent most of their time working in separate areas in his dad’s shop.

He supposes this is how a securely attached child acts around their parents.

“Yes, well, thank you either way. I needed a break from school,” he answers, smiling at them.

“More like a break from Hannibal Lecter,” Beverly mutters.

“Who’s Hannibal Lecter?” Chloe asks loudly.

Her parents stiffen and share a cautious look.

“He’s a bad guy Will’s interviewing for school,” Bev explains concisely.

“Why?”

“It’s a class on criminals. We talk to bad guys to learn why they’re bad.”

“Why?”

“So we can find out how to stop people from being bad.”

“Like Duncan? He pushed me off the swing at school. He’s bad.”

Bev grins. “Yeah, exactly.”

“You didn’t mention that, Birdy,” Mrs. Katz says softly. She’s looking at Will with a strange hesitance, and he feels his face fall in response.

“Oh, it’s not a big deal,” Bev assures her, waving it off.

Seth pipes up, “Didn’t the last guy who talked to him kill–”

“Not in front of your sister,” Mrs. Katz hisses.

Seth raises his hands and zips his mouth shut.

“Kill who? What happened?” Luke asks.

“It’s grown-up stuff, Luke,” Mr. Katz says.

“But I’m ten now!”

“I’ll tell you later,” Seth whispers.

The adults look like they’re ready to object, but they seem more concerned with Will than with their son learning about a murderer.

Will wishes the floor would swallow him up, wondering if they’re going to ask him to leave.

“Maybe I should go,” he hedges.

“Nonsense!” Bev shouts. “We drove five hours to get here.” She gives her parents a steely look. “Will is my friend. Whatever rumours you’ve heard about Hannibal Lecter don’t apply to him.”

Some sort of wordless communication travels between them before her parents back down, looking a little contrite.

“Sorry about that, Will,” Mrs. Katz says. “But, well, Hannibal Lecter is rather infamous in our line of work. Even most professionals don’t want to deal with him.”

Will smiles, relieved. “No problem. I’d be worried too, but he’s been pretty decent to me.”

Mrs. Katz smiles a bit stiffly at that. “Well, let’s get you set up. There’s a guest room upstairs. Seth, could you show him?”

“Sure.” Seth races upstairs, leaving Will to scramble behind him.

“Your room is next to mine. The girls are all on the third floor. Don’t bother sneaking up to make out with my sister. Dad can hear a pin drop from across the house.”

“I’m really not interested in that kind of relationship with her,” Will grumbles, setting his luggage down on the queen-sized bed. It’s a huge step-up from his bed in Baltimore, and he wonders how Bev can stand not being surrounded by such luxury.

“Why? You gay or something?” Seth asks, causing Will to choke and nearly break the zipper on his bag.

“What? No! I’m–”

“It’s cool if you are. No one will care.”

Will laughs breathlessly, not used to such candid words from anyone but Bev. He supposes that it runs in the family.

“I wouldn’t say *gay* exactly. Gender doesn’t really matter to me that much.”

He suddenly remembers how Hannibal had appeared when he was working out in his cell with his shirt off, and valiantly pushes the memory away, wondering why it had even come to him.

Seth shrugs. “Yeah, lots of people are like that. Mostly girls. Bev told me she made out with a girl at a party once.”

Will chokes on his saliva. “Well…that’s…well.”

Seth grins. “So you’re one-hundred percent sure you’re not into her?”

He shakes his head. “She’s my friend. It’d be weird. I don’t want to make things weird.”

Seth shrugs. “Whatever. Guess that means I don’t have to give you the speech about how if you break her heart, I’ll break your neck.”

Will is easily half a foot taller than the kid; he has a hard time picturing the boy *reaching* his neck, let alone breaking it.

“Well, if I ever decide I’m in love with her, I’ll remember that.”

Seth nods seriously, and then grins. “So, what’s Hannibal Lecter like?”

Will considers brushing the question aside, but realizes it would probably be easier to give the kid a few tidbits of information.

“He’s extremely intelligent and manipulative.”

“Do you know why he ate people?”

Will shrugs. “He hasn’t really given me a reason beyond the fact that he considers most people to be little more than pigs.”

Seth blanches. “That’s fucked up.”

Will laughs. “No arguments here. I still need to figure out *why* he thinks like that.”

“Why do you think he did it?”

Will sighs, leaning against the bed. “I don’t know. He’s hard to read. I’m hoping I get to the bottom of it soon. My grade depends on it.” He smiles, trying to lighten the mood.

Seth smiles back. “Twisted.”

“Seth! Come help set the table!” Mrs. Katz’s voice calls from downstairs.

“Coming!” he yells back, then turns to Will. “Wanna play Goat Simulator with me later?”

Will vaguely recognizes the name of the game, but he’s never played it before. He shrugs. “Sure.”

“Awesome!” Seth exclaims before rushing downstairs, leaving Will a bit stupefied.

For dinner they have pork, rice, and steamed vegetables. They’re all seated at a large dining table. It’s clear that this is normal for them. It’s nice. Dishes and cutlery clink together as everyone fills their plates. Seth holds up a spoonful of rice at his little brother threatening to launch it into his face, only for Mrs. Katz to admonish him. He puts it down with an innocent expression, and the woman has trouble suppressing a smile.

“This is delicious,” Will compliments after sampling some of the pork.

Vicki smiles, ducking her head down. “Thank you. I cooked it myself.”

Bev shrinks back from her plate. “Whoa, whoa, whoa! Mom and dad let you near the stove?”

“Oh, hush, Bevvy! I cook better than you.”

Beverly puts a hand on her heart and the other on her forehead, sighing dramatically. “Tis true. Will’s the best cook out of the three of us. It’s why me and Addy haven’t kicked him out yet.”

Will blushes. “I just follow the instructions on the box.”

Mrs. Katz nods. “That makes you a better cook than most men.”

“Hey!” Mr. Katz says, looking insulted.

“I said *most,* dear,” she soothes, patting his hand.

“I make my own sandwiches now!” Chloe shouts.

Mrs. Katz pats her on the head, shushing her. “Yes, dear. You’re getting very good at that, but no yelling at the table, please.”

“I make my own sandwiches now,” she repeats in a loud whisper.

Will stifles a laugh behind his napkin.

“So, how are your classes going?” Mr. Katz asks Beverly.

“Pretty good.” She shrugs. “I love Anatomy. Dr. Breitkopf says I have a lot of potential.”

“Still interested in forensics?”

“*Yes, mom.* I’m *still* interested,” she answers, rolling her eyes good-naturedly.

“It’s quite a challenging field, Birdy,” Mr. Katz warns. “Long hours, unpleasant environments, and making mistakes can cost people their lives or reputations.”

“I know, dad, but it’s what I want. All I need to do is pass Crawford’s class and I’ll get into med school, no sweat.”

“Is it a difficult class?” Mrs. Katz asks.

Beverly shrugs. “It’s tough sometimes. There’s a lot of theory, but Will helps me study. He’s a natural.”

Mrs. Katz smiles at him. “Is that so?”

Will ducks his head, blushing. “Well, she helps me out in Anatomy, so it’s only fair.”

“You’re doing better,” Bev tells him. “You just have to loosen up a bit more during labs.”

“Do you get to dissect people in class?” Seth asks eagerly.

Bev smiles wickedly. “Parts of them. We got to watch the professor dissect a cancerous liver last week. It had all these yellow bumps and blotches.”

“Gross!”

“Beverly,” her mother admonishes. “We’re eating.”

Bev grins, completely unrepentant. “Sorry, mom.”

“What about your crime class?” Seth pesters. “What’s that like?”

“Pretty boring most of the time, except when Will starts correcting the teacher.”

“I only did that once,” he protests.

“And it was *awesome!* He figured out who The Muralist was just from looking at a picture of his victims. You remember that case, don’t you, mom?”

Mrs. Katz puts a hand over her face. “Please, Birdy, not at the dinner table. Chloe, why don’t you tell us about your ballet class?”

“I can do a pirouette!” The little girl jumps down from the table and does an awkward spin on one leg, finishing in a pose with one leg outstretched and her hands up in the air.

Her parents clap, while Seth cheers obnoxiously loud, adding in a whistle. Luke just rolls his eyes, turning back to his dinner.

Will joins in clapping, and receives a giggle from the little girl as she hides behind her hands.

“Ooh! Chloe’s got a crush!” Vicki teases.

Chloe stomps her foot. “I do not! Shut your mouth!”

“Chloe!” Mrs. Katz rebukes. “We don’t use that kind of language. Back to the table. Vicki, stop teasing your sister.”

Vicki rolls her eyes, giving Will a ‘what are you gonna do?’ look.

After dinner, Will helps them clean up, even against the Katz’s protests.

Once the younger kids are in bed, Mr. and Mrs. Katz ask to talk with him. Beverly comes along too, insistent on making sure they aren’t going to scare him off.

Their living room is large and open, with a big screen TV and surround sound. The leather couches are deep red, separated by a pale beige coffee table. Will can’t help but feel out of place in this opulent setting.

“I hope you don’t think too badly of us, Will,” Mrs. Katz begins hesitantly. “It’s just, well, Hannibal Lecter has a reputation.”

He nods. “Yeah, I know. I wasn’t exactly thrilled to be working with him at first either.”

“At first?” Mr. Katz questions, raising an eyebrow.

Will shrugs. “We have interesting conversations. We even helped the FBI catch a murderer.”

Mrs. Katz’s eyes widen. “Are you sure he wasn’t lying?”

Will shakes his head. “They caught the guy red-handed with his victims. I probably shouldn’t say any more. He hasn’t been tried yet.”

Mr. Katz nods. “That’s probably for the best. Still, don’t be afraid to tell someone if you think he might hurt you.”

Will smiles reassuringly. “I doubt he wants to get rid of me. I make his life interesting.”

Bev’s parents give him stiff smiles, and thank him for talking with them. He wonders if everyone he meets is going to look at him like that from now on. It’s a depressing thought.

After getting into bed, Will finds himself remembering Seth’s suspicion that he and Beverly are together.

Not tired enough to sleep, he tries to imagine what it would be like to be in a relationship with her.

They’d buy a house near her family so she could visit them any time she wanted, and Will would get to spend more time with them, helping Vicki in the kitchen, playing videogames

with Seth and Luke, dancing with Chloe.

It's a beautiful concept, having that kind of stability, but the more Will thinks about it, the more he realizes just how unattainable it is.

Beverly isn't the type of person he wants. Yes, she's brilliant and funny and fearless and outgoing, but he just can't keep up with her. She needs so much more than he can give.

They'd be miserable together. Oh, sure, they'd never be cruel to each other, but they would slowly drift apart. Bev would get tired of Will's constant need to recharge after tiring conversations. Will would get annoyed by her constant need for those conversations.

No, she's not someone he could live with forever. He adores her, but even he knows that Bev is better in small doses.

He rolls over onto his side, pulling the covers up to his chin as he tries to imagine the kind of person he wants.

Appearance doesn't matter to him so much. With his condition, finding beauty beneath flesh is easy.

He wants someone intelligent. He knows that. One thing that drove his parents apart was how different their minds worked. His mother always had a thousand thoughts in her head, while his father was content to focus on one thing at a time. They never really talked much about anything from what Will can remember. He doesn't want that. He wants to be able to bring up a topic and have a long discussion no matter what it is.

Intelligent, good communicator, what else does he want?

Someone who isn't unnerved by the way I think.

He snorts to himself. *Yeah, I'm sure there are a lot of sane people out there who don't get freaked out when their significant other tells them he dreams about cutting them open and licking the blood off their skin–*

Will growls to himself in annoyance, rolling onto his other side. Now is no time to think like that. He's in a nice house with good, decent people, and he needs to be on his best behaviour.

He shuts his eyes tightly, pushing all thoughts away as he employs the techniques he read about after his disastrous conversation with Hannibal on how to build a memory palace. He gathers up the thoughts again – the ones made of blood and pain and terrifying delight – and shoves them into a conjured storage closet. Once they're locked inside, he feels strangely lighter, and he smiles to himself as he drifts off to sleep.

Unfortunately, his dreams are not restful.

He's at the BSHCI, sitting on his chair in front of Hannibal's cell, only Hannibal isn't inside it.

He looks around, vision blurry, and then he feels someone's hands on his shoulders.

Suddenly he's in his bed back in Baltimore with Hannibal leaning over him.

He's shirtless, and Will sees the scars on his chest from when Agent Lass shot him.

Will's hands move of their own accord, tracing them gently.

They open up at his touch, and blood, black as tar, seeps down his fingers.

He looks up at the doctor, staring into his red eyes as he slowly raises his hands up to his mouth to lick the blood off his fingers.

Hannibal shudders above him, shutting his eyes in bliss, and starts to lean down.

Will reaches up and places his hand on the back of Hannibal's neck, mouth open in a silent moan.

Just before their lips meet, Will wakes up with a gasp, shaking and sweaty. He reaches down and realizes that he's hard, practically on the edge of orgasm. For a moment, he just lies there, praying that his body will get the hint and knock it off.

It doesn't work. Every time he closes his eyes he sees Hannibal's face, and his arousal keeps building until he has no choice.

He creeps out of bed and heads for the bathroom down the hall, keeping an eye out for anyone else. He locks the door and turns on the fan.

Biting down on his sleeve to muffle his groans, he takes himself in hand and starts stroking, wanting to get it over with as quickly as possible before he gets caught. It's almost painful, but that just spurs him on to finish.

In his mind, he hears Hannibal whispering in his ear, feels his breath on the back of his neck as he calls him a *cunning boy.*

The memory of the doctor saying those words makes him *throb,* and he strokes faster. He's so *close–*

Slow down, Will. Such pleasures should be savoured.

He obeys unthinkingly, slowing his pace. He rubs his thumb over the tip of his penis, sliding his nail gently over the slit. He groans helplessly into his sleeve, nearly bursting.

Hush, the phantom Hannibal says, laying a kiss on his neck. He arches his head back, whimpering behind his sealed lips, as if to give the doctor more access. If he imagines hard enough, he can almost feel the sensation of the man's chest hair against his back.

He slides his left hand over his stomach, up to his chest, imagining that it's Hannibal's with his long, dextrous fingers. He rubs one of his nipples, knees buckling with pleasure.

He falls forward, grasping the back of the toilet just to remain upright as he comes, pulsing into the water.

“Hannibal!” he gasps, eyes opening wide as he realizes what he’s done, the glow of florescent lights burning his corneas.

Feeling disgusted, he cleans himself off, giving the toilet a good wash with some cleaning solution and a scrub brush, and goes back to bed. He tries not to think about his dream, or what happened after.

The rest of the week continues along the same vein – minus the disturbing dreams and his even more disturbing reactions to them – and Will gets an inside look at a happy, functional family. The Katz’s work at a law firm together, and often bring their work home with them. The older children look after the younger ones, and manage to get along most of the time.

Seth and Luke insist on making him play the most ridiculous games. He has no idea how anyone came up with the idea to simulate the life of a goat, but it’s surprisingly entertaining. Luke nearly falls to the floor laughing at Will’s surprise when he accidentally blows up a gas station by head-butting a car.

Chloe follows him everywhere he goes, leaving folded-up drawings on the end table next to his bed, giggling and running away whenever he tries to thank her.

Vicki asks him to demonstrate the proper way to make some decent mashed potatoes, (a dab of milk, and a spoonful of butter, mixed well). They end up having to spend over an hour cleaning up, but dinner is delicious.

On Friday, Mrs. Katz kisses him on the cheek as he leaves, telling him what a pleasure it was to have him for the week. “You be sure to come visit us again soon. In fact, I insist. Most of Birdy’s friends aren’t as responsible as you are.”

“Mom!”

Will ducks his head shyly. “I’d love to come back. It’s really…nice…being here. You’re all so happy.”

He wonders for a moment if that sounds too weird, but Mrs. Katz merely pats him on the shoulder and tells him that he really brought out the best in them. “Chloe’s usually not so well-behaved. I think she was trying to impress you,” she tells him with a smile.

Will smiles awkwardly. “Well, tell her to keep it up and I’ll come back sooner.”

Beverly and her parents exchange hugs, and then Bev insists that all her siblings give her a group hug. Luke is somewhat reluctant, but too thankful for the new videogame she bought him to put up much of a fight. Seth gags as he’s engulfed by his siblings’ arms.

Chloe yells that she wants a hug from Will, and he obliges with only a little reluctance and a glance at her parents for permission.

Seth and Luke offer him fist bumps, while Vicki also insists on a hug after Chloe finally releases him with a sloppy kiss on his cheek.

Will shakes Mr. Katz’s hand and then they finally depart.

Before they get into their cars, Bev turns to him. “See, I told you they would love you.”

Will ducks his head, then smirks mischievously. “Yeah, I guess you were right…Birdy.”

Bev punches his arm before he can duck away, and he laughs, rubbing away the ache.

“Shut it, Graham Cracker.”

Chapter End Notes

Giggling behind my hands So, what did you think? Was that a good way to pop my smut cherry?

In the first draft, Will just has a weird dream about Hannibal almost kissing him, and wakes up confused, but then I remembered, this is Will Graham! He fantasizes about killing people at the drop of a hat! If he had a naughty dream about Hannibal, he's not going to lay there all confused; he's going to get worked up, and fantasize about touching that furry chest, and hearing that sexy voice whispering in his ear, and UMF! *Fanning self* Keep it together, Gweezle!

Beverly's nickname, Birdy, comes from Hettienne Park's (the actress who plays Beverly Katz) first name, a swallow from a Korean fairy tale. It's just something cute I threw in. We've all got nicknames in my family. My username is my first nickname. My dad called me that while I was still in the womb. I have a few others, but that one's my favourite.

I hope you liked Beverly's family. In the show, she says she has a big family and that she's the oldest, so I just ran with that. What's important is that Will has a happy memory to think about when things get bad, and considering what I have planned for him, he's going to need it.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

In The Dark

Chapter Summary

> Will uses a blackout to his advantage and finally learns the story of how Hannibal the Cannibal was born.

Chapter Notes

> Hey, guys! Great news! My stepdad and I aren't leaving until tomorrow afternoon, so I won't be missing any updates after all. What a relief. We're so close to the end. I'm just doing some last minute touch-ups.
>
> Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 11 – Saturday, March 26th, 2016

Going to see Hannibal is a bit more daunting than usual, what with how their conversation ended the week before, but Will is still in a good mood from his visit.

“Good evening, Will. You’re looking much more rested,” Hannibal greets, looking him over with a satisfied nod.

Will grins sheepishly. “Thanks. Sorry I was such a mess last week.”

“It’s perfectly alright. How was your week?”

“Great actually,” he answers gleefully, setting his book-bag down and plopping into his chair. “I visited my friend Beverly’s family. It was amazing.”

“*Just* a friend?” Hannibal presses. “It’s my understanding that most girls your age don’t take boys home to meet their families unless they’re interested in pursuing a romantic relationship.”

Will snorts. “Yeah, her brother asked me the same thing. I’m really not interested in her that way. She only invited me because her parents heard about my dad dying and said it would be alright.”

“Are you sure *she* is not interested in *you?*”

Will's nose crinkles in distaste. "Honestly, I think she pretty much considers me an honorary little brother. Now, Bev's little sister *definitely* has a bit of a crush on me, but she's only six." He pulls out a crumpled up, lopsided paper heart he'd found in his coat pocket once he got home and holds it up for Hannibal to look at. "Pretty cute, huh?" he asks with just a touch of embarrassment.

There's a flash of something in Hannibal's eyes, but then he smiles. "Indeed, precocious crushes are quite common at that age. Often the recipients are teachers or babysitters, or in this case, an older sibling's friend."

Will grins sheepishly and tucks the paper heart away. "Hope she doesn't get too upset if she sees me with a girlfriend." He thinks for a moment, remembering Seth's words before shrugging nonchalantly. "Or a boyfriend."

Hannibal leans forward and folds his hands on his desk. "Are you bisexual, Will?"

"W-well I…you know," Will sputters a bit, squirming awkwardly in his chair. "I guess I've always thought that what's between your ears is more important than what's between your legs. Unless I'm specifically looking for someone to have children with, biological sex isn't really that important."

"Are you planning to have children?"

He thinks about that for a moment. "Before this week, I probably would've said no, but after hanging out with Bev's siblings…well…maybe. I guess it depends on whether I'm willing to risk them inheriting…" He gestures to his head with a wave. "…whatever goes on up here."

"They seem to have made a very positive impression on you."

Will smiles wistfully. "They're kind of what I always wanted *my family* to be like." Instantly, he realizes what he said, and quickly backtracks. "I mean, don't get me wrong. My dad was great, but it could get lonely. Would've been nice to have a few siblings around to hang out with."

Hannibal nods along. "They seem like a good influence. You're smiling far more than you usually do."

Will grins shamelessly. "Well, it was fun! I can't really remember the last time I felt so comfortable around people. Usually I get all awkward and end up moping in a corner or something while Bev does all the talking."

"You seem quite comfortable with *me.*"

Will suddenly remembers what he'd done that first night at the Katz's and looks away, cheeks burning. "Yeah, well…you're easier to talk to than most people."

"Many people would disagree. I'm apparently quite disturbing," Hannibal says gravely.

Will laughs after noticing the mirth in the older man's eyes. "You take the bad with the good, I guess. That's how relationships work."

Hannibal hums happily, leaning back in his chair. “You truly are endlessly fascinating, Will. Just when I think I understand you, you say something that changes my perspective.”

Will stares back at him, confused by that statement.

“I’m not sure I under–”

Just then, darkness floods the hallway, cutting him off.

Will feels his heartbeat accelerate through the roof.

“Oh, this is not good,” he points out, voice shaking.

His entire body trembles, imagination going wild as he tries to figure out the cause of the blackout. A whole host of possibilities flash through his mind, from rodents chewing through some wires, to the first sign of a nuclear holocaust.

Even *he* knows that last thought is completely stupid, but his mind is working against him now.

He wraps his arms around his stomach, feeling like he’s going to pass out if he doesn’t calm down.

“Are you alright, Will?” Hannibal asks, as poised as ever.

Will thinks about lying, putting up a front for the man, but suddenly realizes that this is the perfect opportunity to get Hannibal to open up.

He’s distressed, ridiculously so given the circumstances, but it’s real enough that maybe the doctor can be convinced Will is incapable of subterfuge when he’s like this.

Authenticity is vital when dealing with someone like Hannibal.

“No,” Will admits, trying to quiet his breathing.

It’s unbearably loud in the silent hallway without even the hum of electricity or the buzz of fluorescent lights to mask it.

“There’s nothing to be afraid of, Will,” Hannibal reassures him, but Will detects just the slightest bit of amusement at his predicament.

“Oh, no, nothing at all to be worried about,” Will quips bitingly. “I’m just alone in the dark. No big deal. It’s not as if I’m surrounded by murderers.”

He wonders if that went too far as Hannibal doesn’t respond.

“I’m sorry,” he says, although it’s kind of stupid to apologize for pointing out that Hannibal is indeed a murderer. It’s not as if the man feels guilty about it. “I’m just a little freaked out right now.”

His voice sounds so small and frightened. High-pitched as well, like a child's.

He wonders how much of this is an act.

"You're not alone, Will. I'm standing right beside you."

Will lets out a hysterical giggle just as the backup generators finally kick in.

The cellblock is bathed in an eerie red glow, and Will is startled to realize that Hannibal has somehow maneuvered his way from behind his desk to stand directly in front of Will, all without making a sound.

"Mr. Graham?" Barney calls out from down the hallway.

Will swallows the lump in his throat and calls back, "Hey, Barney. What's going on?"

He's standing behind the gate separating the cellblock from the hallway, and Will has a sinking suspicion that it isn't going to be opening anytime soon.

"I'll be right back," he says to Hannibal as he gets up and walks over to the orderly.

Barney looks downright repentant. "I'm really sorry about this, Mr. Graham. Looks like you're going to be stuck in here for a while. It's standard protocol to keep people inside the building until we can check on everyone. Last thing we want is an inmate going missing."

Will rubs the back of his neck nervously. "I understand. How long am I supposed to stay here exactly?"

"Two, three hours, tops. We already called in an electrician. It's going to cost a pretty penny considering how late it is, but you'll be out of there as soon as possible."

"Great. Just great."

"I can open the gate and you can stay in the cafeteria if you'd prefer. We're having a late dinner to pass the time."

Will almost takes him up on that, but remembers his plan. He shakes his head. "No, I'll be fine. Maybe later. I think I'll just stay here for now."

Barney looks like he wants to protest, but eventually nods. "If any of them start acting up, just give me a holler."

Will smiles, the expression feeling broken on his face. "Thanks, Barney. Hopefully I won't have to."

Barney nods again, and they both shift around in awkward silence.

"Better get back to the cafeteria. Dr. Chilton's not pleased right now. The nightshift workers called in sick today. Stomach bug."

Will has a strong suspicion that the two men's *stomach bugs* were more than likely caused by a long night of partying.

"Lucky them. They avoided this mess."

"Here's hoping they're worshipping the porcelain god right now."

Will cracks a smile, this one a little less painful on his face. "Probably. I better get back to Hannibal."

Barney smiles back and waves as he leaves.

Will turns around, fighting down the urge to call the man back so he can go sit in the safety of the cafeteria instead of hang out with a murderer in the dark.

He walks back to his chair and sits down. "Looks like I'm stuck here until the electrician fixes the power."

Hannibal has pulled his chair out from behind his desk to sit directly in front of the glass, mirroring Will. He smiles. "Then I hope they take their time. I'd rather not be deprived of your company."

Will laughs briefly. "Thanks for the ego boost. Most people wouldn't take that as a good thing."

"As you've already mentioned, I am not like most people."

"Definitely not." Will stumbles around for a topic of conversation, feeling thrown off by the interruption. "So, what do you want to talk about?" he finally asks.

"I'd like to hear more about your childhood, if you feel comfortable with that."

Will doesn't, actually, but figures divulging a few things won't hurt his chances of getting Hannibal to open up in return.

"Not much to tell. My mother left when I was four. Dad raised me by himself."

"He never remarried?"

"He never loved anyone as much as he loved my mother," Will confesses, feeling like he's betraying the man. "They fell in love when they were sixteen, got married right out of high school. After I was born, my mother realized all her dreams were over. She used to sing to me – said she was going to be on Broadway someday." He trails off. "She couldn't take it anymore, so she left. Afterwards, my dad and I moved around a lot until his great-uncle left him his business in Baltimore. They'd met during a family reunion and talked shop the whole time. Dad was the only person he trusted to run the place. I was homeschooled until I got into college. Aside from that, I had a pretty normal life."

"You were homeschooled out of convenience in your early childhood, so why didn't you begin attending school when you settled permanently in Maryland?"

Will grimaces, looking away. “Well, by that point I had gotten so used to learning on my own that I didn’t see the point. I mean, dad signed me up for courses over the summer: self-defence, choir, woodshop, stuff like that, but I don’t think I would have handled school that well.”

He forces himself to make eye contact. “What about you? Where did you go to school?”

Hannibal smiles indulgently. “I was largely homeschooled as well. Father hired several tutors for me, but I outgrew them rapidly.” His smile turns a bit more feral. “Public schooling was not befitting to people of our stature.”

“So your family was wealthy?” Will asks, already knowing the answer.

“Quite, even by standards set by Baltimore’s Elite. Historically, the Lecter name has carried quite a bit of political weight in Lithuania, at least until the Second World War.”

Will’s interest is peaked. “What happened then?”

Hannibal looks away, somber for a moment. “The Soviets took over, arresting and deporting many citizens to Siberia gulags – prison camps. My family escaped this fate, but they had already lost much of their power by the time I was born. Not so much that we were reduced to commoners, but enough to make my father ashamed of what we had become.” His eyes grow misty. “He and mother did not take care of themselves. They died soon after I turned fourteen.”

Will senses that there is more to this story but Hannibal appears reluctant to go on.

“Who took care of you after they died?”

Hannibal closes his eyes. “No one. We were alone.”

“We?” Will repeats, catching the slip immediately. “Who else was with you?”

Hannibal slowly opens his eyes, and Will realizes that it wasn’t a mistake at all, but a calculated tactic to entice.

“I’ll tell you, if you answer a question for me.”

Reluctantly, Will asks, “What do you want to know?”

Hannibal smiles, looking almost blissful under the red glare.

“I want to know when you first thought about killing someone.”

“What?” Will balks, his entire body jerking away as if in protest. “That’s not – look, my mind has *always* worked this way–”

“I don’t mean when you first discovered that you could look into a murderer’s mind and see their reasons for wanting someone dead. I want to know when *you,* of your own volition, first thought about murdering someone.”

“Why?” Will blurts out, aghast.

“I’m curious what your answer will be.”

Will lowers his head, looking up at the man through his eyebrows. “And if I say I’ve never wanted to kill anyone?”

“I’d know you were lying,” Hannibal replies smugly.

He grits his teeth. “Does it matter? I’ve never hurt anyone.”

“But you’ve thought about it,” Hannibal states, leaning in closer, his voice like silk. “You’ve thought about ripping Dr. Chilton’s throat open and pulling out his tongue,” he reminds him.

“That wasn’t me,” Will denies petulantly, crossing his arms over his chest. “*You* probably planted that. You and your mind games.”

“You were in *your* memory palace when you said that, Will. Don’t try to blame me for your own desires.”

He closes his eyes, curling up in his seat as he shakes his head. “I don’t want to talk about this.”

“Then I suppose we have nothing more to say to each other,” Hannibal relents. He stands and reaches down to pick up his chair, clearly finished with this conversation.

“Wait!”

He shouted louder than he intended. It echoes down the hallway, but the other patients are all in a medicated sleep, likely unaware that he is even present.

Hannibal looks at him expectantly.

Will doesn’t want to tell him. He doesn’t want to tell him about that terrible night when he was only four. When they were still a family.

“Wave to the camera, Will. That’s a beauty.”

“Look, mommy! I caught a fish!”

“Damnit, Will! It’s dripping everywhere!”

A sharp sound echoes in his head, and he feels a phantom sting on his cheek.

“Emmy, you didn’t have to hit him! Will, go to your room for a bit.”

His feet carrying him down the hallway to his bedroom, fish in one hand, camera in the other, tears welling up in his eyes.

“I can’t do this anymore, Eddie! I can’t! I just can’t!”

Leaning his back against the door. Hearing muffled sobs and his father's plaintive voice. Setting the camera down and pulling out the small switchblade his father gave him to cut the line. Laying the fish out in front of him and lining up the knife with its underbelly. Hearing his mother's voice as he slices through it. Watching the blood spread in a puddle on the floor.

No, he isn't going to tell Hannibal *that.*

But it's not like that's the only time he's thought about killing someone.

"I was fourteen," he says, shoulders sagging.

Hannibal effortlessly sits back down, crossing his legs and folding his hands in his lap. "Who was it?"

Will doesn't look at him, can barely bring himself to speak. He doesn't like to think about this. He doesn't like acknowledging that there is something so broken in him, more than just an empathy disorder can explain.

"A guy in my woodshop class. I don't know his name, but I know his type. Everyone thought he was great. Handsome, rich, popular, athletic. He was a star student at his school, probably bound for Harvard or Princeton."

"Were you jealous of him?"

Will snarls, face twisting in disgust. "No! That's not why I hated him. I never cared about things like that."

"Why did you hate him then?"

A face flashes in his mind, both striking and miserable.

"He had a girlfriend. She was beautiful, sweet." He pauses, then says bitterly, "Trailer trash."

Hannibal doesn't react to his choice of words, and Will continues.

"She'd come to see him every class, and I'd just see it in her eyes. Mr. Perfect wasn't so perfect." He thinks back, choosing his words carefully. "One day, before class, I was walking through the parking lot behind the shop, and I saw her in his car. She was crying, trying to hide a black eye with some makeup. He was standing outside, smoking. He didn't see me, but she did. She just *looked* at me, and I turned away like a coward."

"He was abusing her," Hannibal says, understanding immediately.

"It was nothing she wasn't used to," Will says bitterly. "Trailer trash, remember? Her mom and dad weren't much better. She was resigned to it by then. Couldn't imagine finding anyone else, because she loved him." He smiles brokenly. "That's the worst part. I could *feel* how much she loved him. When he came into the classroom, and started complaining to his friends about how his girlfriend was being *such* a whiney bitch that day, I just wanted to grab him by the hair and smash his face into the buzz saw." He stops, taking a breath as the familiar scene plays out behind his eyes. "It wasn't a passing thought either. The class lasted

an hour and a half, and every ten minutes or so, I'd just look at him and imagine what it would be like to shut him up for good."

"Why didn't you?"

He wants to say it's because he's a good person who would never hurt anybody, but he knows Hannibal won't fall for that. "Too many witnesses. I could never get him alone. Then the class ended, and I never went back. I was too scared that I wouldn't be able to stop myself next time." He smiles his broken smile once more. "I kind of wish I'd done it anyway. I saw his girlfriend's picture in the paper a few weeks later. She was found beaten half to death in front of her house. Last I checked, she's still in the hospital with permanent brain damage. There's no proof that he did it, but I know it was him. His family ended up paying for her medical bills. I think they were just trying to keep things quiet, not that she'll be saying much ever again."

"You were angered by the injustice."

"I was angrier at myself. I should've done something."

"Killing him would not have saved her. She would have moved on to another abusive relationship. It's a very difficult cycle to break."

"At least then she'd have had a *chance* to break it."

"Not everyone can be saved."

"I didn't even *try* to save her."

"You were a child. You didn't know how."

"That doesn't mean anything."

Hannibal tilted his head. "You have quite the guilt complex, Will. It won't do you any good to go through life feeling like you have to save everyone."

"I like saving people. It makes me feel like I'm less of a monster when I think about killing them."

He shuts his mouth, eyes widening, alarmed that those words had slipped out. "I didn't mean–"

Hannibal smiles tenderly. "You're not a monster, Will. Even your darkest fantasies are spurred on by your desire to help those in need. I find that rather admirable. The world would be a much better place if people were more like you."

Warmth floods Will's stomach as he fights the urge to blush. It's not true, not really, but even so, a smile lights up his face as he tries to hide behind his hair.

"Thank you."

He stares at his hands, ringing the strap of his book-bag. “What about you?” he asks. “What made you decide to start killing people?”

Hannibal continues to smile, but his eyes are hard. “What do you think?”

He licks his lips. “You have impeccable control over yourself,” he begins. “You stalk your prey for weeks or months before acting. You’re too meticulous for anything else.” Will glances up at his face, staring at the shadows covering his eyes. “You could have gone your whole life without ever hurting anyone, but something set you off. Maybe it was your parents’ deaths? No,” he corrects himself instantly. “Their deaths were inevitable. You accepted them.” He thinks back. “You said, *we were alone.* There was someone else with you after they died.”

“Yes,” Hannibal confirms, an edge of some hidden emotion in his voice.

“Who was it?” he asks, although he wonders if he already knows. Suddenly Hannibal’s protectiveness towards Margot, his kindness to Georgia, his respect for Miriam Lass, it all starts to make a sickening sort of sense.

“My sister.”

Will finally recognizes Hannibal’s emotion as grief, and feels his stomach tighten and his throat close up, sharing the man’s misery automatically.

“What happened?” he chokes out, blinking back tears.

He rises from his chair, suddenly filled with a frenzy of energy, and steps closer to the glass.

Hannibal mirrors him, approaching close enough that they could reach out and touch each other.

If Barney saw them, he’d be yelling at Will to back away, but he knows Hannibal isn’t interested in hurting him – not right now, at least.

“What happened to you?”

“Nothing happened to me,” Hannibal says softly. “I happened.”

Will gazes at him imploringly. “Please, tell me.”

Hannibal is silent for a few moments, then slowly begins to speak. “Her name was Mischa.” The grief in his voice is real, more real perhaps than any emotion he has ever expressed. It feels like being gored from the inside.

“After our parents passed, I looked after her. We were waiting for our aunt to arrive. However, the weather took a turn for the worst, and she was delayed. She had sent her handmaiden ahead to watch over us.” Hannibal smiles softly. “Chiyoh was barely more than a child herself, but she was an impressive woman. I was quite fond of her.”

“One night, during a brutal snowstorm, a man came to our home to beg for food and shelter. I let him in and went to make him something to eat.”

Hannibal closes his eyes, perhaps trying to mask his pain. Will feels it nevertheless.

“Chiyoh was out in the barn gathering eggs. Mischa was…she was playing in her room. I could hear her singing to herself. *Ein Männlein steht im Walde.*” He smiles, and Will is stunned to see a tear roll down his cheek. He feels the urge to reach out and wipe it off, but can only stand and watch.

“I didn’t hear her screaming until it was too late.”

Will lets out a shuddering breath, mind already filling in the blanks.

Hannibal, preparing a meal in the kitchen, being a good host as his father would have taught him.

The stranger, hearing a child’s voice, creeping up the stairs, lured in like a sailor to a siren.

She would’ve been beautiful, Hannibal’s sister, golden hair and cheeks round with baby fat.

A different type of hunger filling the stranger as he approaches.

Hannibal, hearing his sister’s distress, dropping the plates and racing up the stairs – not fast enough, *never* fast enough – and finding the man. The *monster*…

Will shudders. “Did you kill him?”

“No.” A million emotions accompany that word.

“Is he still alive?”

“As far as I know. I left him in the care of my aunt’s handmaiden. He’ll never see the sunlight again.”

Will is silent for a long time. “You ate her, didn’t you? Your sister.”

Hannibal doesn’t respond.

Will keeps talking, staring right through the older man. “You ate her because…you loved her. You couldn’t stand the *thought* of her being gone, so you made sure a part of her would be with you forever.” His eyes burn. He reaches up to touch them and is surprised to find his cheeks are drenched in salty tears.

He wipes them away hastily and continues, “You ate her because you loved her, but you ate *them* because they’re *scum!*”

He paces in front of the glass, glaring at the floor. “That man, he abused your *sacred hospitality.*” He snarls, stopping in place. “Rude.”

“I feel like I should applaud,” Hannibal says, a mask of indifference slipping back on.

Will finally gains control of himself and looks at him, exhaustion clear on his face. “That would be rather inappropriate, don’t you think?”

“Will you be putting my story in your report?” Hannibal asks, startling Will. He’d almost forgotten about the reason they were talking. “An orphaned teenager turning to cannibalism after the murder of his beloved sister? Will you track down my old home and rescue the miserable beast who killed her? Will you finally give Crawford the answers he’s so desperate for, thus ensuring his eternal gratitude?”

Hannibal sounds almost bitter, and Will knows that this is the truth, not a story concocted to generate sympathy for the man’s entertainment.

He doesn’t know how to respond, knowing that he finally has the answers he’s worked so hard for.

To give them up to anyone would be like betraying a friend.

At that moment, the lights come back on, prompting Will to look at the ceiling in surprise.

He almost makes a comment about perfect timing, but can’t bring himself to make any jokes, not with a child’s screams echoing in his head.

He looks back down at Hannibal, sees the pain in his eyes, and turns away.

“I guess I’ll see you next week,” is all he can bring himself to say.

“I will be in my new cell by then,” Hannibal says softly. “I’m looking forward to the change of scenery.”

Chapter End Notes

> Now, I know what you're thinking. Blah, blah, dead sister, blah, blah, Freudian excuse, blah, blah, *Hannibal Rising* wasn't as good as *Silence of the Lambs*. However, I should point out that I used Mads Mikkelsen's own theory for Hannibal's backstory. Hannibal didn't kill his sister, but he did eat her. The man locked in the dungeon killed her. I merely expanded on that, (and implied that the stranger was a pedophile, or at least someone who liked hurting children).
>
> Here's something else you should consider - Will lied about when he wanted to kill someone for the first time. Might Hannibal have done the same? Antisocial personality traits can be present from infancy. Even if Mischa's murder set him off, there's no way to predict if her survival would mean Hannibal wouldn't still become a serial killer. He might not have become a cannibal, but that's its own pathology. It still doesn't justify what he did, but it does help to explain it.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Conflicted

Chapter Summary

Will struggles to decide whether he should tell Crawford about Hannibal's secrets.

Chapter Notes

Just a few more chapters before the end. Oh, I can't wait!

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, March 27th – Friday, April 1st

On Sunday, Will sits down to compile his notes together for Crawford's report. Beverly and Ardelia give him his space, going so far as to order pizza for dinner rather than disturb him.

The outline stares back at him, still mostly blank until late into the afternoon.

He shuts his laptop, resolving to finish the report by Saturday.

Both he and Beverly receive emails from Professor Crawford Sunday night stating that class will resume on Monday.

Bev frowns at her phone. "Only a week after his wife attempts suicide and he's already back at school. Am I a terrible person for hoping he'd just stay home for the rest of the semester and give us all automatic A's?"

"Probably," Will answers, earning himself a smack on the shoulder.

Ardelia shakes her head at them, not looking up from her textbook.

They're lounging on the couch – Will sandwiched between the two girls – trying to find something to watch on Netflix.

Bev sighs. "This isn't how Netflix and chill works."

"I'm not having sex with either of you," Will says stiffly, scrolling through the menu. "What about *Shadow Hunters?*"

"*Ugh!* I read the book it's based on back in high school. It wasn't *bad, per se,* but it was just *riddled* with clichés." She lays her head down on the armrest and closes her eyes. "Just find something you want to watch. I'm probably going to fall asleep halfway through it anyway."

"How about *The New Detectives?* 'Real-life forensic scientists solve baffling crimes by using a wide range of techniques to investigate the tiniest and most obscure of clues,'" he recites.

"That show is twenty years old," Ardelia says, pointing to the date of 1996 in the description. "Not exactly *new.*"

"It could still be good," Will argues defensively.

"If you want to study forensics, honey, you should at least find out what they do in *this* century."

"Well maybe I don't *want* to study forensics," he grumbles, scrolling through the menu again.

Bev opens her eyes, and she and Ardelia exchange glances.

"Will Graham, profiling prodigy, the *only* reason I'm passing Crawford's class, doesn't want to work in forensics?"

He sighs. "Just leave it, Bev."

She sits up, frowning at him. "No, I'm not gonna leave it. You *love* that kind of stuff. You practically have your career laid out for you, what with Crawford's old trainee taking you under her wing or whatever's going on between you two." She smiles mischievously. "Hey, is *that* why you don't want to have sex with us? I never thought *you* of all people would have to sleep your way to the top."

Will holds the remote up threateningly. "I'll do it," he says, faking out a toss at her face.

She puts her hands up in response, giggling. "Okay, I get it. You're not together. But seriously, I thought that's what you wanted."

He sets the remote down on his thigh. "I thought so too. Now I'm not so sure."

"What changed your mind?" Ardelia asks, getting right to the point.

Will sighs, knowing this won't end well. "Something Hannibal Lecter said to me," he replies honestly.

Beverly's nose crinkles up. "Oh, great. So he *has* been messing with your head."

"It's not like that!" he protests. "It's just…he's seen what I do when I'm recreating a crime scene. He *knows* how much it affects me sometimes. I just – I don't know. I'm wondering if it's *healthy* for me to be around that kind of stuff."

Ardelia nods somberly. "It's a valid concern. Let's face it, law enforcement agents burn out, especially the ones who get too emotionally involved in their cases."

He sighs again. “Yeah, and I can’t exactly turn my empathy off. Hannibal gave me some advice on how to, like, build up my sense of self or something so I don’t get lost in other peoples’ emotions.”

Ardelia gives Bev a cautious glance. “That…might not be such a bad idea.”

Beverly glares at her. “You can’t honestly believe he should trust that psycho!”

Will feels a momentary sense of irritation at Beverly’s blatant disregard. “I’ve done my research; it’s a legitimate strategy.”

Bev looks at him, and his anger melts away as he sees her honest concern. “Are you *sure* he’s not just screwing with your head?”

“I don’t think so.”

“So you don’t *know?*” she presses, reaching for his hand.

Will pulls it away. “I know how he works. He’s not trying to make me hurt myself. I think he honestly wants to help.”

Bev scoffs. “Yeah, right.”

He shrugs. “The guy was pretty revered as a psychiatrist before everything came out. Is it really so hard to believe that he knows what he’s doing?”

“I’m just having a hard time understanding *why* he’d want to help you.”

Will thinks about giving her his own explanation – that Hannibal responds to others’ distress by alleviating it in such a way that it makes them more dependent on him, but he realizes that that isn’t reassuring in the least. He’s also not entirely sure that it applies in this situation.

“Maybe he’s just bored, and I’m his new project,” Will guesses. “Or maybe he’s hoping that if I become successful, he’ll be able to take some credit for it.”

Bev’s mouth turns up in disgust, and she crosses her arms with a huff. “Yeah, probably. Just *please* fact check before you do anything he says.”

He smiles at her. “I promise.”

Ardelia snatches the remote off his thigh. “Great, now that that’s settled, I call dibs on picking the show.” She goes to the search bar and enters in a few words.

Will’s eyebrows go up. “*Great Crimes and Trials?*”

She tilts her head up loftily. “A few of the episodes talk about killers from my textbooks, and I’ve always found I remember videos better than books.”

“We are *not* watching the one about BTK,” Bev states with a shudder. “I don’t need more nightmares.”

Will nods in agreement.

Ardelia shrugs. “Suit yourself.”

On Monday, Will and Beverly make it to Crawford’s class with only seconds to spare.

Crawford doesn’t even seem to notice them. He’s focused on getting the projector to work. When he’s finally done, he turns around to eye them stoically.

“This is your last week for interviews. Some of you have already completed your projects, while others have had…difficulties.” He glances in Will’s direction for a moment before he continues. “Bear in mind that every piece of information you extract from your subjects is vital to the FBI, and to your grade.”

A few students chuckle at this, and Crawford actually smiles a bit before he continues.

“I don’t expect perfection, but I *do* expect you to at least run your report through a spell-checker before you hand it in. You’re adults. If you haven’t figured out how to do that yet, then google it.”

More laughter from the students, but Will sits silently, analyzing the teacher’s every move.

Is he using humour as a defence mechanism?

Crawford has never struck him as a man who *needs* any defence mechanisms. He’s solid, like bedrock. It’s bizarre to see him acting so human.

They spend the class going over the outline of their final project and Will wonders how he’s going to translate Hannibal’s history onto paper without losing the essence of who he is.

“Remember, no blank spaces,” Crawford repeats sternly. “Off you go.”

The students pack up, few seeming to care why their teacher is acting so laidback, just grateful that he’s lightened up.

After the other students leave, Will approaches Crawford hesitantly. “Sir?”

Crawford glances over his shoulder. “Hey, Will. Did you get my email?”

He nods. “Yes, sir. I’m glad your wife is okay.”

Crawford sighs. “She’s still in the hospital. I’m afraid if I take her home…” he trails off, staring at the chalkboard.

“That she might try again,” Will finishes bluntly.

Crawford chuckles bitterly. “Yeah, guess I shouldn’t bother pussyfooting around you, Graham.”

Will gives him a strained smile. “That generally doesn’t go well for anyone.”

“How’s your report coming along?”

Will doesn’t know how to respond. He has all the information Crawford could ever desire, but he doesn’t know how he’s supposed to part with it. The story Hannibal told him about his sister won’t leave his mind.

“As well as I expected. Dr. Lecter is still tight-lipped about a lot of things, but I’ve managed to track down someone who knew him before he came to America.”

Crawford double-takes. “Who?” he demands, all business.

“Inspector Rinaldo Pazzi,” Will answers. “He tried to have Dr. Lecter arrested for murder back in the 90’s.”

“The *90’s!*” Crawford repeats, stunned.

Will nods. “1995, to be exact. In Italy.”

Crawford looks like he needs to sit down, so Will drags the chair from behind his desk. Crawford snaps out of it long enough to glare at him for treating him like an invalid, but sinks into it nonetheless.

“How did you figure this out?”

Will shrugs, looking away. “I talked to his old psychiatrist, the one he saw before he was arrested. She said that an Italian police officer was the first person to call Dr. Lecter a monster.”

“*And?*”

“I googled the Italian word for *monster,* and I found half a dozen murder tableaus that were right up Dr. Lecter’s alley, committed by someone they called The Monster of Florence.”

Crawford pinches the bridge of his nose. “Stupid, stupid,” he mutters under his breath. “I never even *considered* the possibility that he started killing before he became the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“Neither did I, sir, at least not until I talked to his psychiatrist,” Will placates.

Crawford laughs bitterly. “Yeah, but you’re just a kid. *I’m* supposed to be the Behavioural Sciences Unit’s greatest agent.” He sighs, rubbing at his temples. “What the hell am I supposed to do?”

Will rubs his arm, uncomfortable by the naked emotion on Crawford’s face. “Contact Pazzi, reopen the case. Someone else was punished for Dr. Lecter’s crimes. You could help clear their name, and I guess you’d restore Pazzi’s reputation,” he adds reluctantly.

“Yeah, I’ll do that,” Crawford says distractedly. He suddenly gives Will a firm look. “Have you put in your application for the Forensics course?”

Will cringes. “Not yet, sir.”

“Well, get on it,” his teacher says sharply. “What you’ve done this semester is incredible, Will. I don’t think you realize just how much you’ve accomplished.”

Will looks down, flushing. “Thank you, sir.”

Crawford stands up, reaching out to squeeze his shoulder. “Don’t mention it. Now, how much does a phone call to Italy set you back?”

“I don’t know. We Skyped.”

Crawford chuckles again. “The marvels of modern technology.” He gives Will’s shoulder one more squeeze. “I’ll see you next class.”

Will nods reluctantly and turns around to leave before pausing. He looks back hesitantly. “Sir?”

“Yes?” Crawford grunts, not turning around as he rifles through some lesson plans.

“I think you should bring your wife home.”

Crawford looks at him, eyes narrowed. “I’m sorry?”

Will ducks his head before steadying himself. He forces himself to look Crawford in the eye. “She’s going to die. You know it and she knows it, so don’t…don’t make her spend the rest of her life in a hospital. She deserves to have a few more good days.”

Crawford’s expression turns distant, eyes looking over his shoulder. He nods to himself. “She’ll have them. I’ll make sure of it.” He focuses back on his student. “Thanks, Will, for everything.”

Will smiles, letting Crawford’s gratitude sweep over him. “No problem, sir. See you on Wednesday.” With that, he leaves.

By Friday, he still hasn’t written anything new in his report, and is starting to feel the pressure to choose his new major.

“Something bothering you, Will?” Dr. Bloom asks, startling him.

He jerks away from his laptop. He’d been staring blankly at the outline for his project for the last five minutes.

“Um, yeah. I’m fine,” he says unconvincingly, tabbing into his thesis once more.

Dr. Bloom arches her eyebrows, not saying anything.

Will caves in.

“Hannibal told me why he started killing,” he admits, feeling like he’s lancing a wound and squeezing out the pus. He gets out of his seat and starts pacing. “I know it’s wrong, but I can’t condemn him for it. What happened to him was *awful.* I just – I feel so bad for him. I know I shouldn’t. I’ve seen photos of what he’s done. I *know* what he is, but I still–” He breaks off, biting his lip. “When he told me what happened, I felt like *I was him.* I felt everything he did in that moment, and I think I would have done the same thing.”

Dr. Bloom is silent for a moment, then gets up from behind her desk, and reaches out to wrap her arms around him.

He stiffens, unused to being held, but soon collapses into her embrace, boneless and worn out.

“It’s okay, Will,” she says, rubbing circles on his back. “There is nothing wrong with feeling pity for Dr. Lecter. I’ve counselled my fair share of violent patients – people who have done terrible things – and to this day I still find myself sympathizing with many of them. You’re not a bad person just because you can think like one.”

That statement reassures him more than anything else ever has, and he shudders in relief.

She squeezes him a bit tighter. “Sometimes terrible things happen to people, and they react by doing terrible things to others. There is nothing wrong with you for understanding that. You are so gifted, Will, and you’re going to do great things. I know it. Believe me when I say I *wish* I was half as talented as you are. I can see you becoming an amazing therapist one day, and I only hope I can learn from your example.” She steps back, keeping her hands on his shoulders. “Hannibal trusts you’ll know what to do with the knowledge he gave you.”

“But I *don’t* know what to do with it,” he confesses. “I know I should tell Professor Crawford. That’s the whole *point* of these interviews – learning about Hannibal’s past – but if I do that, it’ll feel like I’m betraying him.”

Dr. Bloom looks at him thoughtfully. “Then I guess it depends on whether you think Dr. Lecter needs a criminologist or a therapist.”

Will stares at her. “You think he told me about…what happened…to help with my *career choice?*”

Dr. Bloom sighs, brushing her hair back. “It’s how he works. He’ll never tell you straight-out, but he’ll expect you to do the right thing. The problem is figuring out what the right thing is. As manipulative as he is, I think he honestly wants to help you. Don’t think he’s the only one who’s noticed how much you’re struggling to choose a career path,” she chides gently.

Will blushes, ducking his head. “Either way, I’m helping people, aren’t I?”

“Maybe so, but that doesn’t mean you should sacrifice your own beliefs because of a job. I’ve been doing that for too long myself.” She pauses, straightening her back as she looks at him. “This will be my last year teaching here. I think it’s time to set up a new practice.”

He stares at her, surprised by her vehemence. “If that’s what you want to do,” he says slowly, shaking his head and looking down. “I wish I knew what to do. I know I should tell the truth, but…”

“You don’t have to lie,” Dr. Bloom tells him, looking forlorn. “You don’t have to tell the exact truth either. Just say what you think needs to be said.”

Will almost asks if that’s what she and Margot did, but refrains. He doesn’t want to make Dr. Bloom angry with him, and he doesn’t want to tell Crawford the truth about Mischa.

He blinks, wondering where that thought came from, even as more fill his head.

He knows what Crawford wants. He’d told Hannibal flat out a month ago. He wants Hannibal humiliated, brought down from his ivory tower. Will can’t imagine learning that Hannibal had devoured his murdered sister would aid the former FBI agent in understanding him. Crawford doesn’t want to understand Hannibal. He sees killers as something so entirely *other* that he’d never comprehend the true significance of what Hannibal had done.

Will almost pities the man for his blindness.

And then he feels angry, because he *knows* Crawford isn’t above taunting Hannibal about his dead sister, of making it sound like Hannibal is just some broken child lashing out at the world when he is so much *more* than that.

The thought of Crawford standing smugly outside of Hannibal’s cell, telling him that Will had spilled the beans in his report, and now *everyone* would know what Hannibal did…

It makes Will’s gut twist. He doesn’t want that to happen. He wants Hannibal to trust him. He wants to keep having conversations about everything and nothing. He wants to be the one who *helps* him.

He knows what he has to do.

The relief he feels is palpable, and he gives Dr. Bloom a determined nod.

“Thank you, Dr. Bloom. I’d better get to class.” He starts to pack up his books, then looks up. “I know it’s a bit early to think about, but do you think – in a few years – I could work as a research assistant for you? I’m not looking for any handouts, I mean, but I know you, and I know how you work, and I think I could work well with you–”

“That would be wonderful, Will,” Dr. Bloom says, smiling broadly. “I can’t imagine taking on a better student.”

Will blushes, muttering a thanks, and stumbles out of the room to head for Crawford’s class.

When he gets home that night, he sits down at his laptop and opens the outline for Crawford’s report. He fills the blank spaces quickly, hesitating for only a moment when he gets to the questions about Hannibal’s past.

‘Dr. Hannibal Lecter was born into a wealthy family in Lithuania. It had suffered great political upheaval after World War II. His parents died when he was fourteen, and he was left in charge of his younger sister, Mischa.’

Will pauses, wondering if he’s really going to do this. If Crawford ever discovers his deception, he will do his best to discredit Will for the rest of his life.

Then you’d better make it believable, Graham.

‘His first victim was a stranger who came to Lecter’s home looking for food and shelter during a blizzard. Hannibal Lecter, only a child then, let him in, and left him to warm himself by the fire while he cooked something to eat. His sister, Mischa, was playing upstairs by herself. Dr. Lecter remembers hearing her singing to herself as he began to cook. He didn’t immediately notice when she stopped, but when he heard her scream he raced up the stairs to find her.

‘He was too late. The stranger had already killed her. But that wasn’t all he was doing. The stranger had a knife in his hands, and as Hannibal watched in horror, he cut into Mischa’s face, tearing off a stringy chunk of flesh, and–’

Will pauses again.

Does this sound too much like a story?

Probably, and he doubts Professor Crawford will tolerate this kind of narrative in his report. Will erases the two paragraphs and starts over, trying to make it sound as clinical as he can.

In the end, the report gets done sometime around 3:00 a.m. Will is exhausted, but relieved. He reminds himself that he still has other assignments to finish, but they can wait.

He falls asleep with a smile on his face, looking forward to his last meeting with Hannibal.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter is basically everyone giving Will Graham a hug. It makes me so happy.

Yeah, Will is lying for Hannibal, just as many of you predicted. He couldn't betray his friend like that. My babies are so precious!

Shadow Hunters - I haven't watched the show yet, but I did read the book when I was a teenager. A lot of the plot seemed a bit contrived to me. Maybe I'm getting too old. If you like it, that's good. I might check it out myself to see if they've worked out the kinks. (Not like that, you pervs, though I do remember there was something about surprise incest in the books, but hey, it worked in *Star Wars!*)

Next chapter is the final meeting between Will and Hannibal. Bring tissues. I didn't hold back.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Fond Farewell

Chapter Summary

Will and Hannibal say goodbye.

Chapter Notes

Hey, guys! I had a blast last night. Went to Caesars to see Bill Engvall perform in Windsor. I also won almost $70.00 at the slots. First time I've ever been in a casino! It was great. Dinner was okay, but the buffet was a bit limited. My stepdad didn't approve. At least there were cookies. I wore a dress I haven't touched in almost four years. I looked pretty fine if I do say so myself. The mascara was a mistake, though. I also either have to start tanning, or I need a lighter coverup. Considering it's February, I'll just get some new coverup. Less chance of skin cancer. (Hey, it was 15 degrees Celcius yesterday, in *February!* That's like - *quickly googles converting Celcius to Fahrenheit* - 59 degrees Fahrenheit! In *February!* Even Bill Engvall couldn't believe it!)

Okay, no more yammering. You're here for Hannibal and Will's last meeting. Well, here it is.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Session 12 – Saturday, April 2nd, 2016

“Hello, Mr. Graham,” Barney greets Will with a smile as he enters the hospital for his last interview. He points down a new hallway. “Right this way.”

Will nods. “Thanks, Barney.” He shifts his book-bag higher on his shoulder. “Um, you know, you can call me Will, if you want.”

The older man looks around surreptitiously. “Well, as long as Dr. Chilton doesn’t hear. The man’s a stickler for that kind of thing. Guests must be treated with respect after all.”

And orderlies are barely acknowledged, goes unsaid.

Will frowns, looking off to the side. “Right. Well, I’d better get moving.”

“I’ll lead you there,” Barney says, taking him down a series of hallways.

Hannibal's new residence is behind five locked doors. It's completely isolated from the other patients. Barney opens the door for him and gestures that he should go inside. "I'll see you out in an hour, Will."

"Thanks, Barney."

When Will enters the final room, he's surprised by the opulence. It's easily three times as large as Hannibal's previous cell. The bed is still little more than a cot, but there is a cushioned armchair behind a beautifully crafted desk. There are two enormous shelves filled with books, as well as a display table in one corner for Hannibal's finished drawings. There's a toilet as well, with a curtain he can draw around him for some privacy.

"Do you like my new cage?" Hannibal asks, getting up off of his bed to stand at attention near the glass.

Will sweeps his eyes across the room again. "It's very gilded," he comments wryly.

Hannibal smiles, eyes crinkling. "I said the same thing when Dr. Chilton first showed it to me. He was not amused."

Will smiles back. "I'm sure that must have devastated you."

"I don't know how I will ever cope."

Will snickers, finding a luxurious chestnut brown armchair to sit in. "Dr. Bloom really went all out."

"She hopes that by preying on my sense of good taste, she can keep me content enough to stop hurting others."

"And is it working?"

Hannibal presses his lips together. "Too soon to tell, though I do appreciate the new books."

Will nods hesitantly, looking at the man's chin. "I finished my report on you," he says bluntly.

The doctor tilts his head, and Will makes brief eye contact with him before turning away to rummage through his bag. "Thought you might want to read it first," he says, pulling out the assignment.

Hannibal looks at the papers, and then looks at him. "I already know my own story, Will."

The younger man shrugs. "Maybe you'd be interested in an outsider's perspective."

Hannibal gestures with his chin to the food tray. "Let's see it then."

It's almost rude, the way he's acting, but Will can't blame him, not after the way he was stripped bare during their last meeting.

He places the papers in the tray, removing the paperclip and stashing it into his pocket, then he takes a step back as Hannibal approaches it, holding the assignment delicately. He turns and heads for his desk, sitting down gracefully, and begins skimming through the words.

Will takes his seat again, watching Hannibal's face closely.

At one of the first questions, Hannibal freezes, going back a page and rereading it more slowly. He glances up, catching Will's eyes with a penetrating stare, and points to a section of the paper. "This isn't what happened."

Will shrugs again. "It's what I decided to write. Do you think Crawford will buy it?"

Hannibal continues to stare at him, the barest hint of confusion on his face, until he finally seems to grasp what the younger man is doing.

"This is rather risky, Will," he warns, unable to stop himself from smiling.

Will smiles back. "I know, that's why I'm asking you if it'll hold up."

"I would be willing to go along with it, albeit reluctantly."

Will crosses his arms and leans back. "Well, that's the point, isn't it? It's your greatest secret. You never wanted anyone to know until you met me."

Hannibal nods gratefully. "Thank you, Will, but I must ask why you're doing this."

Will's arms tighten until he's almost hugging himself. "I wouldn't put it past Crawford or Chilton to use what happened to your sister to torment you. I can't let that happen, so I lied."

"And what about the man who killed her?"

Will allows himself to smile darkly at the older man. "You tell me. You're the one who killed him."

Hannibal gazes at him like he's just performed a perfect aria – entranced and awed. Will looks away again, embarrassed.

"If there's anything you want me to change, I can still rewrite some things before the final draft is due."

Hannibal looks down at the paper, reaching down to caress the first page. "Write that my father's manor burnt to the ground. No one will be able to verify if it's true or not. So many people lost their homes in mysterious ways during those years."

Will nods. "I can do that."

The doctor looks up at him, tears welling up in his eyes. "Thank you, Will."

Will dips his head, embarrassed by the naked emotion on Hannibal's face. "Uh, no problem."

They're both silent for a long while, only the ticking of a clock marks its passing. Will wonders if Hannibal appreciates knowing what time it is now. It must be terrible to never know when the sun is up without someone telling you.

"This is very good," Hannibal says as he finishes the final page, tapping the papers on his desk to straighten them out.

Will blushes, rising from his seat. "Thanks." He approaches the glass just as Hannibal places the papers back in the tray, and reaches out to pick them up unthinkingly.

The barest brush of Hannibal's finger against his hand makes him freeze, but the doctor takes no further action, merely smiling fondly as Will looks up in shock.

Hannibal turns around, allowing Will to gather his composure as he nearly tears the papers in his haste to retrieve them.

"You could get in a lot of trouble for that," he points out breathlessly.

Hannibal tilts his head, still not turning around. "I assure you, Will, it was worth it."

He laughs nervously in response, looking at the doors as if waiting for one of the orderlies to barge in and tell him to leave. "Partly my fault, I suppose," he admits.

Hannibal finally turns around to face him, looking unbearably smug. "The security systems in here are still being adjusted. No one is watching." His smile broadens. "I won't tell if you won't."

Will scoffs. "Sure, we'll just add it to our pile of secrets."

"I'd be most happy to keep all of your secrets, Will."

Will tries very hard not to think about what those secrets are as he stashes his assignment away, making a mental note to edit it the way Hannibal wants when he gets home.

He collapses into his armchair, heart still racing a bit. "So, this is our last interview," he states bluntly.

Hannibal leans against his desk, splaying his hands behind him to keep himself balanced. "You never were much for dancing around a subject," he comments drolly.

Will looks down, fiddling with the strap of his book-bag. "Well – I mean – is there anything else you want to talk about before I go?"

"I'd rather you never leave."

Will snickers. "Well, as much as I appreciate your company, I doubt Chilton would make that easy for me." He looks up, giving Hannibal a stern frown. "That's not an invitation for you to do something to get rid of him. If you do that, I won't come back to visit you at all."

Hannibal looks like he very much doubts that, and replies with a faux-coy smile, “I promise. I’ll be on my best behaviour.”

“And now you’re back to being a smartass.”

Hannibal merely smirks at him, and finally goes to sit down at his desk. “What about you, Will? What would *you* like to talk about?”

“I don’t know.” Will then looks away, biting his lip. “Well, actually, there is one thing. I’ve decided to go into clinical psychiatry.”

Hannibal folds his hands on his desk. “Uncle Jack must be devastated.”

“I haven’t told him yet.”

“Are you worried about his reaction?”

Will rubs his chin nervously. “I’ve decided it doesn’t really matter what he thinks. It’s my life, after all.”

Hannibal smiles. “That’s a healthy attitude to take in this situation. I get the feeling that Jack Crawford does not care about your well-being as much as he should.”

Will shrugs. “He’s just a teacher. It’s not like he knows me all that well.”

Hannibal looks delighted by that statement. “What are you planning to specialize in?”

“Uh, well I…” He looks away, embarrassed again. “I was actually hoping I might be able to get a job here one day.”

Hannibal hums, looking quite pleased. “That *would* be one way to continue speaking with me.”

Will rolls his eyes. “It’s not just about *you.* I like being here. I mean, I like talking to the patients here. I think I could do some good.”

“Most of the patients here are not expected to ever leave.”

He shrugs. “So I get some consistency. Sounds fine to me. Maybe one day I’ll replace Chilton as the general administrator.”

“There would be much rejoicing if you were to do that, I assure you.”

“I’m not thinking about applause. I’m just thinking this place needs a bit of an upgrade.”

Hannibal hums thoughtfully again. “Yes, of course. Money is tight, activities are limited, therapy sessions are quite short and usually done by incompetents, and the orderlies can be rather aggressive at times.”

Will stiffens. “Aggressive?” Without even thinking about it, his eyes scan over Hannibal’s entire body, looking for signs of violence.

Hannibal smiles indulgently. “It’s not as bad as what you saw with Mr. Murray your first day here, though he is not above threats of physical harm in order to force compliance.”

Will frowns at him. “That isn’t right.”

“Well, that can be your first action when you become administrator – firing people like him.”

Will doesn’t smile. “Yeah, I just might. At least you don’t have to deal with him anymore.”

Hannibal’s smile turns strained. “I’m afraid he and Mr. Brown were picked to be my night orderlies.”

Will’s eyes widen. “I thought Dr. Bloom said you’d have your pick of orderlies.”

“It’s not so bad. Barney and Denise are decent people, and I’ll be asleep through most of their shifts.”

“That doesn’t make it right.”

“It’s a small sacrifice, given what else I’ve received.” He gestures around his new cell. “Perhaps I can convince them to allow me some music as well.”

Seeing how unconcerned Hannibal is, Will decides to let it go. “When do you think your new trial will start?”

Hannibal arches an eyebrow at him, and he blushes. “I mean, Crawford seemed pretty convinced there would be a new one.”

“Oh, undoubtedly, but it will take some time. The legal system is already quite busy. My trial will probably be pushed back for months before anything is reviewed, and even then only because of my notoriety.”

“I’ll be sure to follow it.”

“You might be called in as a witness,” Hannibal suggests slyly. “I suppose we’d get to chat again.”

Will smiles. “Maybe, but most likely your lawyer won’t want you to have any contact with me.”

“How unfortunate.”

“We all have our struggles.” He leans back in his chair, crossing one leg over the other. “I probably won’t be able to visit again, at least not until school is over. Exams are going to be hell.”

Hannibal’s lips quirk up. “What do you plan to do for the summer?”

Will sits up straighter. “Since Bev is going home, me and Addy are going to split on the rent for the next few months, but I’ll be looking for somewhere a little closer to my new school. Dr. Bloom suggested I go for a Doctor of Psychology – a Psy.D. – instead of a Ph.D., and there’s only one school in Baltimore that offers it as a degree.”

Hannibal nods. “It’s a good idea. Ph.D.s generally focus more on theoretical work. A Psy.D. focuses on practical applications. If you intend to go into clinical practice, it’s your best bet, although Ph.D.s offer flexibility in case you ever want to go into teaching or research.”

“And we’ve already established that I *don’t*.”

“Of course.” Hannibal smiles, putting his hands behind his head as he leans back in his chair. “May I ask what your other plans are?”

He shrugs. “Dr. Bloom has offered to mentor me, and maybe someday take me on as an intern once she gets her practice set up again.”

“Is she planning to do so?”

He nods. “Yeah, she has to finish up the year because of her teaching contract, but she says she’s going to quit after that.”

“Any reason why?”

Will grimaces. “Probably because of Crawford. She believes he gets away with too much, and she doesn’t feel like her opinions are being respected.”

Hannibal nods thoughtfully. “That’s probably for the best. Jack has been overstepping his boundaries since he started working for the FBI, and is unlikely to change his tactics at this point.”

Will sighs. “Yeah, don’t I know it. I might not care that much about what he thinks of my career plans, but that doesn’t mean he can’t make it harder for me to achieve them.”

“He’s certainly not above using your empathy against you.”

He frowns. “Well, a little more work on my memory palace and soon that won’t be a problem anymore.”

“It would please me quite a lot to know that your life has improved because of my assistance.”

Will rolls his eyes good-naturedly. “Oh, you just want something to brag about when Chilton starts getting all greater-than-thou on you.”

Hannibal places a hand over his heart. “Will, you wound me. I actually *do* find satisfaction in improving my friends’ lives.”

He frowns, scanning the doctor’s expression “I’m not sure people would react very well if you start calling me your friend,” he points out.

“Then I shall refrain from doing so in public,” Hannibal replies, undeterred.

Will snickers, turning away. “You’re awful.”

“You’re not denying it.”

“It’s our last interview. I’m feeling more forgiving than usual.”

“Then perhaps you’d be willing to indulge me.” Hannibal gets to his feet and stands next to the glass. “How would *you* define our relationship?”

Will opens his mouth to respond that they’re just having conversations, but shuts it again after he realizes that it’s not entirely true anymore.

They’ve bantered, exchanged favours, and revealed their deepest secrets to each other. It’s not a traditional friendship by any means, but it feels like it’s deeper than what he has with Beverly or Ardelia. He can’t think of anyone else he’s confided in as much as he has with Hannibal.

“It’s not exactly a friendship,” he finally says. “I’m not sure how to describe it.”

Hannibal nods, then says thoughtfully, “I suppose words fail to capture what we are. It doesn’t really matter. As long as we know where we stand with each other.”

Will laughs nervously. “I’m not exactly sure about that myself.”

“There’s a simple question you could ask yourself to clear things up.” Hannibal leans forward, eyes piercing. “Is it *good* to see me?”

Will’s automatic reaction is to look away, but this time he stops himself and looks back. His eyes sweep over Hannibal’s face and he feels himself start to smile.

“Yeah, it is.”

Hannibal smiles back. “Then there’s your answer.” His eyes flicker up, almost unwillingly, and Will follows his gaze to the clock, seeing that their time is almost up.

“Would you do me a favour, Will?” Hannibal asks, straightening up behind his desk.

Will nods before he can even think about disagreeing.

“Play *Ein Männlein steht im Walde* before you go.” His eyes clamp shut, and an almost pained shudder goes through him before he opens them again. “I’d like to be able to think of you when I hear it in my dreams.”

Will presses his lips together, then reaches into his pocket for his phone. “Do you want to… *talk*…about Mischa?”

It’s the clumsiest attempt at psychoanalysis he’s ever tried, but Hannibal just smiles gently at him, forgiving his awkward approach. “Not right now, no. I’d like to in the future, but at the

moment I just want to hear that song."

Will smiles back, a little sadly. "The only version I could find has a bunch of kids singing it. Is that alright?"

"Yes."

"Okay." He scrolls through his music until he finds it, and presses play.

They both fall silent until the song ends. It's not even a minute long, but it seems to take forever. Hannibal's gaze never wavers from him throughout.

Once it's over, they both breathe a sigh. "Thank you, Will. I wish you the best of luck in your future."

Will wonders if he should acknowledge the tears gathering in Hannibal's eyes, but realizes his own are not as dry as he'd expected. He clears his throat as quietly as he can as he gets to his feet, swinging his bag over his shoulder.

"Thank you for everything, Hannibal." He smiles as sincerely as he can even as he fights to maintain his composure. "It was nice to get to know you."

Hannibal only nods in response, already slipping back into his memory palace to replay their final moments together over and over again.

Will takes a deep breath and heads for the door.

Chapter End Notes

Blowing my nose obnoxiously loud Shut up! I'm not crying! *You're* crying!

Perfectly composed Anyway, I hope I did this chapter justice.

Now, I think we are all aware that Hannibal is going to break out of prison, but have you figured out *how?* I've left clues going all the way back to the first chapters about what is going to happen, so get your detective hats on, and I'll see you tomorrow.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Hidden

Chapter Summary

Hannibal escapes.

Chapter Notes

Oh, so many clever doves! I don't want to spoil the surprise, so let's get right to it.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Friday, April 22th

“I think I’m going to die,” Bev laments as she finally comes out of Crawford’s exam room.

Will gets up from his spot on the radiator, having waited for his friend to finish for the last twenty minutes. “I’m sure you did fine.”

“I forgot *everything!* I nearly broke my pencil twice filling in those little circles. And essay questions! How cruel do you have to be to have *three* essay questions?”

Will tries desperately not to laugh, but Bev catches the smile on his face and slugs him.

“I hate you, you know. This was your last one, and now you’re free! I’ve got one in Chemistry this afternoon. *Chemistry!* So many equations.” She grabs the sleeve of his black pea coat and uses it to muffle her groans.

“Hey!” He jerks out of her grip. “Come on, Bev! This thing is brand new.”

She sticks her tongue out at him and collapses against a wall with her eyes closed. “I’m so tired. Leave me here to perish.”

Other students are trickling out of Crawford’s class – giving him dirty looks or staring at Beverly’s melodramatic performance. Will rolls his eyes good-naturedly and picks Bev up in a fireman’s carry. She lets out a shriek, and then starts laughing hysterically. “Okay, okay, you’ve made your point! Put me down!”

Crawford appears at the door, giving them both his most intimidating glare. “Keep it down out here. People are still writing.”

Will ducks his head, not willing to protest when Crawford has made it pretty clear how pissed he is that Will won't allow himself to be used as a pawn in Crawford's political games. Not that that's how it was phrased. Their conversation was mostly about how Will was throwing away an amazing career as a profiler on the off-chance he could overcome his social failings to become a half-decent psychiatrist.

Dr. Bloom had not been amused when he'd told her about it, and Will is in no hurry to see a repeat performance of *that* blowout

"Sorry, *Professor.*" It's a subtle dig, and he doubts Crawford even realizes he's doing it on purpose.

Will puts Beverly down and they walk towards the cafeteria.

"Jeez, I liked him better when he only hated me."

"He doesn't hate me, Bev," Will lies. "He just thinks I'd be a better profiler than a psychiatrist, and he doesn't want me to throw away that future."

She scoffs. "Bullshit."

They finally reach the cafeteria, only beginning to fill up with exhausted students. Of course Crawford would start his exam at 8:00 a.m.

They order something to eat and find a table.

Bev starts picking at her bagel morosely. "You know, you don't have to suffer with me all day. Go home after this. Go enjoy yourself."

"You just want me to cook you a nice dinner," he accuses her with a fond smile.

She smiles back. "Well, yeah, but that's no reason you shouldn't go have some fun. Catch a movie or something. I can survive without you."

Will sips at his coffee, nodding. "Yeah, that sounds good. Just let me finish this and I'll head out." He crams his bagel into his mouth and Beverly giggles as his cheeks bulge. He swallows his food and grins at her.

"You have some bread in between your teeth," she says, pointing it out for him.

He swipes his tongue over it and grins again. "All clear?"

She gives him a thumbs up. "Ready for takeoff."

They toss their garbage out and head their separate ways. Force of habit takes Will closer and closer to Dr. Bloom's office, but he stutters to a stop when he hears raised voices coming from the next hallway.

"How could they let this happen? They had guards on him 24-7!" It's Jack Crawford, and he sounds angrier than Will has ever heard before.

“It’s Hannibal Lecter, Jack. You know what he’s like.”

Will recognizes that voice as well. It’s Agent Miriam Lass, and at the mention of Hannibal’s name he feels his stomach clench in fear.

Oh, please tell me he’s alright.

Had Hannibal killed himself? If he had, why hadn’t Will *seen* what he was going to do? He tries to think back. Was Hannibal depressed when he left? Why didn’t he check up on him sooner?

He collapses against the wall when he hears Dr. Bloom join in. “It doesn’t make any sense. I paid for that new cell myself. There’s *no way* Dr. Lecter could have escaped.”

At first, Will is relieved – *Hannibal isn’t dead!* – but then he realizes what she just said.

Hannibal escaped?

Agent Lass responds, “I’m sorry, but it’s true. One of the orderlies reported it this morning. Lecter’s cell was empty, and they can’t get in touch with the two night orderlies. We’ve got officers canvassing the neighbourhood, roadblocks are going up–”

A cellphone rings, and she stops. Will hears her greet someone with a sharp, “This is Agent Lass,” and then there is silence for nearly a minute.

“Well?” Crawford demands when she finally finishes her call.

“They just found the orderlies,” she says somberly.

“Where?” Will asks, coming around the corner.

“Will!” Dr. Bloom exclaims. Her eyes dart over him, and Will gets the brief impression that she wants to bundle him up and hide him away somewhere. “You should go home.”

“You sure that’s a good idea?” Crawford asks brusquely. “Lecter could be waiting for him. Maybe it’s best if he sticks close by.”

“Jack!” she hisses. “Don’t scare him like that.”

“I’m not scared,” he lies, walking over. “What happened, Agent Lass?”

She sighs, rubbing at her temple. “We’re not exactly sure. Somehow, the cameras were knocked out in Lecter’s new cellblock last night and no one reported it. It wasn’t until this morning that an orderly discovered Lecter was missing and called the authorities. Two orderlies went missing as well.”

“Which ones?” Will asks, dread filling him. “Was it Brown and Murray?”

Agent Lass looks surprised. “Yes, how did you–”

“Are they dead?”

They all turn to look at Agent Lass.

“Yes,” she sighs. “A teacher discovered their bodies at a nearby high school. I’m going there now.”

Will straightens up, feeling determined. “I want to go.”

“Out of the question.”

“Wait, Miriam,” Crawford protests. He’s eyeing Will speculatively.

“Jack, Prurnell won’t like it. She wasn’t even happy when I insisted on talking to *you.*”

“I’ll deal with the fallout, but you’ve seen what Will can do. He *knows* how Lecter thinks. We might be able to catch him before he kills anyone else.”

“He’s a civilian. It was one thing for *me* to see things like that. I was training to be an FBI agent.”

“He’s a civilian who helped catch a serial killer two months ago. Doesn’t that count for something?”

Agent Lass gives in. “Fine, follow behind me, but *you’re* dealing with Prurnell.”

Crawford frowns. “She’s already there?”

“It’s Hannibal Lecter, Jack. *Everyone* is there.”

Will hitches a ride with Crawford and Dr. Bloom, who insists on coming along just in case the scene is too much for him.

When they arrive, the area has been cordoned off, the parking lot is filled with police officers, onlookers, and a few reporters.

A stern-faced woman walks up to Agent Lass when she arrives.

“Just stay quiet, Will. I’ll deal with her,” Crawford says.

Will stays by the car as Crawford goes to speak with Prurnell. She doesn’t look happy to see him, her face fixed in a permanent frown. Agent Lass looks increasingly uncomfortable as they talk.

Will looks around, taking in the scenery. The school is located behind an iron fence with a long path up the driveway. It’s obviously one of the better schools in the area.

“You don’t have to do this, Will. We can still leave if you want,” Dr. Bloom tells him.

He shakes his head. “I want to do something. If I go home, I’ll just go crazy wondering what happened.”

Prurnell looks over at him and holds up her hand, curling her finger in a ‘come here’ gesture.

He goes, ducking his head as a camera flashes nearby. Dr. Bloom follows behind him, her mere presence making him feel more secure.

“Mr. Graham, Agent Lass tells me you think you can help us track down Hannibal Lecter.” Her tone indicates that she finds this hard to believe.

He gulps. “I won’t know until I see the crime scene, ma’am, but I’d like to try.”

She stares at him, making him want to fidget.

“Come inside, and *don’t* touch anything.”

Her heels clack across the pavement as they walk through the doors into the hallway of the school. The doors are taped off, two officers standing guard, but Prurnell bypasses them with barely a glance.

Once inside, they walk down a hallway toward the shop class.

“What does it look like in there?” Crawford asks, struggling to keep up.

“About as bad as his other crime scenes,” she answers vaguely.

“Have we confirmed the victims’ identities?” Agent Lass asks.

“Mr. Brown was wearing his ID tag. The other man was not. We assume that it’s Kyle Murray as he has not been located yet, but we’re running his prints to be sure.”

“Couldn’t we just ask for a copy of his photo ID?”

“His face is…not in good enough condition to be used to identify him,” Prurnell answers reluctantly, making them all fall silent.

“Mr. Graham,” she continues, getting Will’s attention. “I am aware that you provided some assistance in the Adam Rain case earlier this year. That is the *only* reason I am even *considering* this action.”

“Not to mention the fact that it’s Hannibal Lecter,” he comments wryly.

Prurnell frowns, displeasure clear on her face.

He quickly backtracks. “I meant that I talked to Dr. Lecter for months. I know a lot about his behaviours and motivations.”

She’s silent for a moment longer before replying, “Nothing would make me happier than for this to end quickly, and without any more bloodshed. In light of the ongoing investigation into Lecter’s possible crimes, we’re making his recapture our top priority. Anything you can do to aid in this endeavour will go a long way towards earning the FBI’s gratitude, Mr. Graham.”

Will decides not to point out that he really doesn't care what the FBI thinks of him, and simply nods.

They finally reach the door, and he mentally prepares himself.

They enter the room, and Will takes in the scene bit by bit.

Crime scene techs litter the room, carefully documenting evidence with photographs, taking hair samples, examining blood spatter.

The rack used to transfer Hannibal Lecter is there, a straitjacket in a heap beside it, clearly torn in some way.

The body on the far end of the room is the first thing he really looks at, staged like the centerpiece of a buffet table.

It's Matthew Brown.

He's positioned like a crucified man, hands dripping with blood, pinned to the chalkboard.

Will looks closer and sees two large nails sticking into his palms, the flesh ragged and torn from the weight of his body. His toes barely touch the floor. His chest is bare, shirt ripped open and tossed aside.

His ribcage is exposed, and as Will draws closer, he realizes that the man's heart is missing, replaced by what looks like a bouquet of flowers.

"*Dianthus barbatus,*" a nearby voice pipes up, startling him. An older man with ash blond hair and a lab coat approaches. "Good to see you again, Jack," he says, holding out a hand for Crawford to shake. "Wish it were under better circumstances." Jack nods in reply, but says nothing.

"Price," Agent Lass greets the new man. "What do you have for me?"

"Looks like a textbook Lecter case," another voice says. His hair is dark, with stubble to match, and he gives Will a searching, suspicious look.

Will ducks his head and tries to look unimportant.

The man continues. "He was impaled using a nail gun, and his heart was removed while he was still alive. Guess Lecter wanted a snack for the road." He chuckles a bit before realizing no one else is laughing.

"Joke later, Zeller. Serious face on," Price orders, barely containing his own mirth behind a poker face.

"What were you saying?" Will asks the older man. "You said something in Latin, I think."

"Greek, actually," Price answers, gearing up for a lecture. "From the words *Dios* and *Anthos,* meaning 'of Zeus' and 'flower' respectively. *Barbatus* is derived from *barba* meaning

‘beard’.

Will catches on, eyes flicking back to the body for a split-second. “So…the bouquet in his ribcage means ‘The Bearded Flower of Zeus’?”

“Technically, but it’s generally referred to as ‘Sweet William’.”

Crawford, Dr. Bloom, Agent Lass, and Director Prurnell all turn to look at him as one.

Will fights down the urge to blush, instead remarking sardonically, “Of course it does.”

Both Price and Zeller catch the change in the atmosphere.

“I’m sorry, but who is this?” Zeller interjects, pointing his thumb at Will, but looking at Agent Lass for the answer.

She grimaces. “This is Will Graham. He interviewed Hannibal Lecter for Jack Crawford’s class this year. He uncovered quite a lot about the man.”

Zeller backs away, as if Will is suddenly contagious. “No offence,” he placates, realizing what he’s done. “But I had to help scrape Randall Tier’s victims off the asphalt piece by piece last year.”

“…Don’t worry about it,” Will concedes after a moment of awkward silence.

“And he’s here *because*...” Price asks.

“Will has a talent for understanding killers,” Agent Lass explains. “I’ve seen it firsthand. He helped catch Adam Rain earlier this year.”

“Ah, the Marionette Man!” Price exalts with a grin. “That was a disturbing one.”

She frowns. “Yes, it was. So, if you could just let him have a look around, he’ll be out of your hair soon.”

Price and Zeller exchange a glance, before shrugging simultaneously. “Hey, if he can help, I’m for it,” Price says. “Come on, you gotta see the other one. It’s a bit…*weird* for one of Lecter’s kills.” He hustles Will to the right side of the room.

Will catches a glimpse of the second body, and his vision swims.

It’s Kyle Murray.

He’s been shoved face first into a moving buzz saw. His skull is a mass of blood and bone, nothing recognizable, but Will knows for certain that’s who it is.

Price catches his shoulder as he starts to sway.

“Whoa, whoa, take it easy! I know it’s bad, but don’t contaminate the crime scene.”

Will barely hears him. Seeing his own thoughts – his own *design* – recreated in real life is enough to knock the wind out of him. In his head, he hears a phrase from so long ago echoing, *'Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.'*

"I'm fine," Will says dully, pushing his thoughts away. He takes a step closer to the body, surveying it in its entirety.

He closes his eyes, the pendulum swings.

Their backs are turned as I approach. They don't know I've escaped yet. I'm as stealthy as ever.

Will looks to the right, sees several tools neatly laid out on the woodwork station

They're planning to kill me. I've known this for a long time. Matthew Brown is a parasite, latching on to Kyle Murray's plot to make me suffer. I have no respect for him. He will die screaming.

My hand lurches forward, pressing Kyle Murray's face into the buzz saw, killing him in seconds. Matthew is too slow to react. I hit him in the solar plexus to disable him. He goes down to his knees, gasping for air that just won't come. The nail gun is nearby. I grin, a plan hatching in my mind. There are flowers in the vase on the desk. They're perfect.

Will snaps out of it, gasping, sweat pouring down his face.

This is so much more intense than looking at pictures. It also leaves him with more questions than answers. Why, why would Kyle Murray want to kill Hannibal Lecter?

The answer comes to him as he looks at the man's hair – sees the red blood staining it – and then he wonders how he could've missed something so obvious.

"Miriam!" Zeller calls, startling him out of his reverie. "You're not gonna believe this. We ran this guy's prints to ID him and got a hit off of Missing Persons. Guess who our mystery boy is?"

"Kilian Raspail."

Zeller looks at Will, expression caught between stunned and annoyed by the interruption. "Yeah, that's the guy. Went missing last summer."

"He planned to kill Dr. Lecter," Will states, seeing all the pieces falling together.

Agent Lass looks confused. "I don't know who that is," she admits.

"Benjamin Raspail's son," Will continues, ignoring Zeller's glare. "Hannibal's second victim. Kilian ended up in a hospital after he found out the details of The Ripper's victims. Hannibal probably fed the kid his own father's remains at one of his dinner parties."

"Christ," Agent Lass breathes, bringing a hand up to her mouth. "How did we miss that? Shouldn't this have come up during his background check?"

“Ask *Chilton,*” Will snarls. “He’s the one who hired him.”

Price takes the report, humming to himself. “The kid had some work done to disguise himself: nose job, chin implant, he dyed his hair. Not hard to see why no one recognized him.”

“You talked to this guy, Will?” Crawford asks, blundering his way into the conversation.

Will nods. “Something he said to me, I should’ve figured this out sooner. He said, ‘You think it’ll give anyone comfort to know that someone they love was cut open while they were still alive and served as the main course at one of his dinner parties?’ He just as well explained his motives for doing this. He wanted revenge.”

“What about the other orderly?”

Will grimaces, shifting away from the overbearing man. “Matthew Brown…paid me a bit too much attention. Hannibal didn’t like it. He thought Brown wasn’t worth my time. Brown didn’t like Hannibal either. He probably jumped at the chance to get rid of him.”

“So you’re telling me that two orderlies conspired to break Hannibal Lecter out of prison in order to torture him to death?” Crawford asks him, incredulous.

Will looks around, sees Hannibal’s rack in the perfect position to view the placement of the blades that Raspail planned to use on him, sees the ragged remains of the straitjacket, and nods his head. “Yes, that was the plan, but Hannibal got loose somehow. Do we know what he used to cut the straitjacket off?”

Price shrugs. “Something small and sharp, the size of a pin. No idea how he got a hold of something like that.”

Will freezes, another piece falling into place. “Raspail and Brown were both using safety pins to keep their ID badges from falling off. Would that work?”

Price thinks about it for a moment, then nods hesitantly. “Yeah, that would do it. Once he had a hole big enough, he could’ve gotten himself free. Bit of a contortionist, that one. And he’s got steady hands. All he needed was a few minutes. Although, you’d think the metal detectors would’ve given them a heads up when they took him outside.”

“Not if they shut down the power.”

“Shut down the power? What–” Zeller starts to ask.

“The power went out during one of my visits. They couldn’t find the cause, but I think it was a test run. Raspail needed to know where the backup generators were, how quickly they responded during a blackout. He probably bribed the electrician as well.”

“Seems he thought of everything,” Price says.

“Not everything,” Crawford grumbles, looking at the chaos around him.

Will looks at Price again. “Earlier, you said that something was *weird* about Raspail. What did you mean?”

Price and Zeller exchange another look. “Well,” Zeller begins, “How much do you know about how Lecter kills?”

“Far more than I’d like.”

“So you know his method of operation? His MO, if you would,” Price continues.

Will nods.

“So then you’ll understand why it’s weird that no organs were taken,” Zeller finishes, challenging him to explain it.

“No, no, he wouldn’t take anything from Raspail,” Will states, taking another glance at the scene.

Another exchanged look, and then a simultaneous prodding, “*Because*…”

Will takes a breath, wondering how to explain it to people who don’t know Hannibal. “He… Hannibal thought of his victims as pigs, not worthy of any respect. In his own way, I think he respected Raspail too much to eat any part of him. He saw him as a fellow predator. Maybe he even felt a certain…paternal affection. Hannibal basically assured that Raspail would have a grudge against him. He was probably proud that he had a hand in what Raspail became. That he went through all that effort to get to Hannibal.”

“And yet, Lecter still killed him,” Zeller says skeptically.

“Parents kill their children all the time,” Will replies.

“This is all very interesting, Mr. Graham,” Prurnell pipes up, reminding Will that she’s still there. “But it doesn’t help us predict his next move, or to catch him.”

Will bites back a retort. “He has money, bank accounts you’ve never found. He’s too smart to keep all of his eggs in one basket. He’ll have fake identification, safe houses, disguises, maybe even access to plastic surgeons. This is all long-term, though. For now, he’s lying low, hiding with someone he feels he can trust.”

“Lecter doesn’t trust anyone,” Crawford argues.

You’d be surprised.

“Not completely, no, but all he needs to do is trust that he can manipulate them into staying quiet for a few days.” Will looks over to Dr. Bloom guiltily. “You should check on Bedelia Du Maurier, if she’s still in town. He has some sort of influence over her. Don’t ask me what, because I don’t fully understand it either.”

Dr. Bloom barely acknowledges the name, but Will sees her face tighten for a fraction of a second.

“There’s also…” Will pauses, thinking back to their earlier conversations. “Hannibal told me he received a lot of disturbing letters. Some of them were admirers. There was one – Shana? No, *Shara* Carlino. She wanted to send him one of her kidneys to eat. There are probably more of them, but you’ll have to check his mail.”

“Lecter destroys most of his mail,” Agent Lass says resignedly. “But we’ll track down Ms. Carlino. It’s worth a shot.”

“How many admirers could a guy like Lecter have?” Zeller protests.

“You kidding?” Price replies. “Manson’s still getting marriage proposals. Some ladies love the psychos.”

“I thought that was a scam for attention or something.”

“It happens. Look up Ted Bundy. Guy was practically a sex god.”

“Also a convicted serial killing rapist.”

“Hey, it’s like the girls who dig bad boys, taken to extremes.”

“Yeah, well, I still think they’re crazy.”

“Not gonna argue with that, my friend.”

“Will,” Dr. Bloom interjects, looking more and more anxious the longer she stands there. “I need to know. Do you think Hannibal is going to come after any of us?”

Crawford tightens his grip on his cane, looking like he’s gearing up for round two already.

Agent Lass looks as though the thought of Lecter coming back for revenge hadn’t even occurred to her, and now that it has, she doesn’t know how to process it.

Will stares at Dr. Bloom for a long moment, then shuts his eyes, putting himself back into Hannibal’s mindset.

He opens his eyes. “Your family is safe, Alana. He won’t come after you. He respects you and Margot too much to kill you.”

Dr. Bloom looks slightly uncomfortable at his use of her first name, but it’s overshadowed by relief.

“Same with you, Agent Lass,” Will continues. “He likes you. He told me that himself. Said you’re insightful. He appreciates that too much to snuff it out.”

“What about Jack?” Agent Lass asks, no longer concerned for her own safety. Will’s words are practically gospel to her ears, so sure is he.

“Why would he want to kill Jack?” Will smiles, just an edge of sadism in his expression. “Hannibal’s left him broken and disgraced. Why would he want to end his misery by killing

him when he could watch him suffer for a little longer?"

Their relief vanishes, replaced by horror.

"Will!" Dr. Bloom whispers sharply.

He blinks. "Sorry," he says, shaking his head to clear it. "Sorry," he repeats, avoiding eye contact.

"Freaky," Zeller whispers into Price's ear.

Price nods, shuffling away.

Prurnell's eyebrows arch up, but otherwise she doesn't react outwardly. "Who *will* he go after, then, Mr. Graham?" she pesters, attempting to appear unfazed.

"Chilton," Will says with certainty, eager to move on. "He hates him – thinks he's a lousy psychiatrist, and a worthless human being."

Prurnell nods. "We'll get him some protective detail until Lecter is caught. Agent Lass, find the addresses of the people Mr. Graham mentioned and send someone to interview them. *Not alone.* We'll work under the assumption that Lecter is still in Baltimore. Get a list of vehicles reported stolen in the last…How long have these men been dead?"

"Less than twelve hours," Price answers, ever efficient. "Rigor mortis hasn't completely set in. We'll know for sure after the autopsy, but I'd guess around eight."

"*Twelve* hours. I don't want anything to be missed," Prurnell says.

"Yes, ma'am," Agent Lass replies, taking her phone out to relay the orders.

Price looks slightly offended, but shrugs it off.

"Mr. Graham," Prurnell turns back to him. "I believe it would be prudent to offer you protective detail as well."

Will stiffens, rejecting to notion of being spied on, even for his own safety.

"I – no, no thank you. It won't do any good."

Prurnell's expression grows even more pinched. "Explain."

He struggles to put his thoughts into words, knowing how fatalistic he sounds. "It would be a waste of time and money. Hannibal isn't going to come for me any time soon. He's patient. He waited months – *years* – before killing his chosen victims. Any protective detail you gave me would get complacent after a while, and that's when he'd strike, only he'd add *them* to his body count as well."

"With all due respect, Mr. Graham, I think you underestimate our officers."

“With all due respect, ma’am, I think you underestimate Hannibal Lecter.”

Prurnell’s face pinches up once more. “Then what do you propose we do to protect you?”

Will looks away. “In all honesty, ma’am, I don’t think he wants to hurt me.” He looks at Matthew Brown’s body, heart replaced by flowers which share his name. He can’t help but think that this is Hannibal’s version of a Valentine.

“We were pretty civil to each other, not counting our first meeting. We got to know each other pretty well.” He smiles a broken smile. “If circumstances were different, I’d almost call him a friend.”

“What!” Crawford blusters, crowding into Will’s personal space. “Lecter is a psychopath. Being charming is part of his act. Don’t tell me *you* of all people fell for it.” His cane slams down close to Will’s toes, emphasizing his words.

Will has a passing thought of ramming that cane into Crawford’s mouth and out the back of his neck, but forces it away. “I’m just saying that he has no real reason to kill me, Professor. I’m in the same category as you are; it’s more entertaining to him if I’m alive.”

Crawford’s dark complexion looks almost purple with rage, but it’s not entirely directed at Will, so he ignores it.

He turns back to Director Prurnell. “I’d like to go home now, please. I can’t tell you anything more.”

Prurnell looks unhappy, but resigned. “Understood. Thank you, Mr. Graham. We’ll have someone call you if any new details come up.”

He almost tells her not to bother, but holds his tongue. Having access to the FBI’s knowledge of the case might just save his life, so he agrees with a nod.

Will and Dr. Bloom leave, only one of them uncertain about their fate.

Chapter End Notes

Nice deduction, Ina_K. You got it! What? An offhand comment about someone we've never met from the...second...third chapter...is totally foreshadowing. And the safety pins. I tried to make you guys focus on that instead of the people around Hannibal.

I felt kind of bad for Kilian Raspail. I had a whole head-canon for him. His father was secretly gay and only married his wife, Lorna at his family's insistence. Despite their unhappy relationship, Benjamin Raspail loved his son. I pictured him teaching little Kilian how to play catch, and taking him to a baseball game on his birthday. And then Hannibal took that away from him when he was only fourteen. Sometimes it's hard to remember that Hannibal isn't just killing rude pigs, but actual human beings with

families who love them. Kilian just happened to be resourceful enough to get to him, but not quick enough to finish him off. Maybe if he'd been a little more polite, Hannibal might have let him live. (Probably after cutting off part of his face with the buzz saw, you know, giving him the Mason Verger treatment.)

Matthew Brown, though, I think he was just hoping Will would come to him for comfort after Hannibal died. And if not, well, Will knew to keep a pen handy.

One more chapter after this, and then you'll have to wait a while for the sequel. I sort of know what I want to write, but it'll take me some time to get there. In the meantime, I have a few ideas for other stories that I'll be posting over the next few months. They probably won't be as long as this, but I hope they'll tide you over.

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Life goes on.

Chapter Notes

Okay, guys! Last chapter. Keep an eye out for the next part, but don't expect it for a few months at least. The sequel will be called Mania. I'll be posting some other stories in the meantime. I have so many ideas it's ridiculous.

Thanks for all the comments and critiques, and I hope this lives up to your expectations.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sunday, November 20th, 2016

"How's it going, Dr. Gideon?" Will asks, hoisting his book-bag up higher onto his shoulder.

Dr. Gideon looks up from his book with a grin. "Significantly better now that you've finally arrived. How's old Farley doing?"

"Better," he answers, smiling. "He's starting to respond to direct questions, and he's been drawing a lot. They're hopeful he'll continue improving."

Gideon sighs, throwing his head back. "Oh, the lucky man. You must be so *pleased.* Only a month in a new hospital and he's already a success story."

Will shakes his head. "They're treating him as best they can, but he has a long way to go."

"I should send him a card," Gideon mumbles, and then sits up, a manic grin on his face. "*Speaking* of cards…heard anything from your old pal, Dr. Lecter, lately?"

He huffs, looking away with a faint blush. "No, nothing."

Nothing since his birthday, at least. A card wishing him a happy birthday had been sent to Dr. Bloom's home on June 19th. After the FBI had finished examining it for forensic evidence that Hannibal wasn't stupid enough to leave, he'd been allowed to look at it for a few

moments. The only thing he'd been able to conclude was that Hannibal had drawn the flower – *dianthus barbatus* – on the cover himself.

Will hadn't been too concerned, though Alana and Margot had decided to move into another house just to be on the safe side.

Gideon hums to himself. "Too bad. Maybe he's moved on. Found himself a *new* budding psychiatrist to fuck with."

He scoffs. "Yeah, probably."

"Oh, I'm just *teasing,* Graham. Dr. Lecter would *never* forget about *you.*"

Will smiles thinly. "That's flattering, Dr. Gideon, but I'm pretty sure he has bigger things to worry about than me right now."

Gideon shrugs and turns back to his book. "Whatever helps you sleep at night."

Will shakes his head and walks away. "Nice talking to you, Dr. Gideon," he calls out over his shoulder.

"You too, Mr. Graham!"

His next stop is Adam Rain's cell.

Unlike Farley Portlock – whom Alana Bloom had campaigned to have charges against dropped so he could be transferred to a different hospital – Mr. Rain is unlikely to ever leave the BSHCI, (now properly renamed the Baltimore State Hospital for High-Risk Patients). However, since Dr. Bloom took over the hospital after the investigation into Hannibal Lecter's escape exposed the security flaws and rampant misapplication of funds under Frederick Chilton's administration, things have improved immensely.

Chilton went against the FBI's advice and was last seen boarding a plane to the Bahamas.

No one has heard from him in months.

"Hey, Mr. Rain," Will greets softly, kneeling down in front of the man's cell.

The middle-aged man looks up, setting the two dolls he was playing with on the floor. "Hi!" he says cheerfully. "We're having a dance battle." He points to the dark-haired doll. "Mitch is winning, but Stephanie is getting better."

"Oh?" Will answers, humouring the man like he would a young child. "Who decides who's winning?"

"I do, of course," Rain proclaims, picking the dolls up again and making them swing their legs around.

He nods. "Mitch and Stephanie. Those are the names of the puppets your dad used to show you, aren't they?" The puppets who Adam Rain believed failed to save his father during a

robbery. The ones he'd tried to recreate in human flesh.

Rain hunches over at the mention of his father. "I don't want to talk about that," he says, sounding like he's almost in tears.

"Hey, it's alright," Will whispers. "We don't have to. I just think it's nice that you're okay with using those names when you're playing."

Rain sniffs. "Dr. Bloom said that it wasn't Mitch and Stephanie's fault. She said they couldn't move without daddy's help."

"That's right, Mr. Rain. Do you know *why* they couldn't move?"

Rain's shoulders tremble and he turns away completely. "No! You're going to say they weren't real, but they were! They were my friends." He breaks down in tears and begins rocking himself back and forth.

Will's face crumbles. "I'm sorry, Mr. Rain. I didn't mean to upset you. Here, Dr. Bloom said that it was alright for you to have these." He reaches into his book-bag, pulls out a small, red gift bag, and pushes it through the bars.

Rain sniffles, but reaches out to open it up and gasps. He pulls out the two tiny outfits – one a blue dress, and the other a black tuxedo – and sets them down next to his dolls. "Are these for *them?*" he asks in wonder.

Will smiles. "Yes. Now you can dress them up when they dance." He reaches into the cell and takes the gift bag back while Rain is distracted. "I'll be back in the morning. Maybe they'll put on a show for me."

Rain nods, already undressing *Mitch.* "Thank you. They love them."

"You're welcome."

Seeing that Mr. Rain is retreating back into his fantasies, Will gets up and leaves. He heads over to what was once Frederick Chilton's office. The door is open, and Dr. Bloom can be heard conversing in a childish voice.

"Yes, Marky, you have to eat *all* your carrots before you're allowed a cookie." She holds up her finger when she sees him enter, giving him an apologetic look. He takes a moment to look around, seeing the redecorated room filled with half a dozen pictures drawn by Marquise Verger-Bloom instead of Chilton's many minor awards. It feels warmer and less sterile than it used to.

"I love you too, sweetie." She makes a kissy noise into her phone and hangs up, blushing a little. "Sorry about that. Dinner emergency."

He smiles. "Oh, it's fine," he reassures her. "I gave Mr. Rain the doll clothes. He seemed really happy."

She sighs. “Good, that’s about all we can do for him. His brain damage was worse than initially thought. There have been some signs of regression. I’m starting to think we should consult a neurologist just to be on the safe side.”

Will frowns. “Is it that bad?”

“We won’t know until we check. I’ll schedule an appointment with Dr. Sutcliffe.” She ruffles through some papers on her desk. “Oh, where did I put his business card?”

Will glances at her computer. “You could try emailing the hospital where he works to get his number.”

She pauses, then nods. “Good idea. Thanks, Will.”

He glances down at her desk as she types a quick email to Johns Hopkins. There’s a printout from a website he recognizes all too well on top of a pile of papers.

Bill’s First Victim Found!

Dr. Bloom sees what he’s looking at and quickly covers it. “Jack Crawford dropped it off this morning. There’s apparently a fourth victim now as well.”

Will nods, still staring at the spot where a blurred-out photo of a bloated body lies underneath. “I heard he got his old job back.”

She frowns. “That’s right. I guess after Bella…passed…they re-evaluated him for the position. The only difference is now he’s working *under* Miriam Lass.”

“Probably because of the public outcry,” Will reasons. “With Hannibal out of prison, they think they’ll be safer if the man who caught him is working on his case.”

She nods. “Partially.”

“And then there’s Buffalo Bill,” he says flippantly.

She rubs at her temples. “Oh, please don’t. Jack was already here asking me for *my* opinion.”

He scoffs. “Which is another way of saying he wants you to ask for my opinion.”

She sighs. “That’s about right.”

“They found another victim?”

“Will,” she says hopelessly.

“I promise I won’t get involved, but it wouldn’t hurt to have a look.” He gives her a weak smile.

She’s silent for a moment, and then pulls out the printout. “If you think it’s necessary.”

He takes it, looking at the picture. The image is a sad one. A girl no older than Will, chubby, though most of that is probably bloating from the water. There are mottled bruises around her neck. The skin of her feet has been degloved – meaning that it slid off somehow. Bev has told him about that happening to corpses. It's exactly as disgusting as it sounds.

Considering how long it took to find her…

"He weighed her down?"

Dr. Bloom nods hesitantly.

"She must've been special to him."

Dr. Bloom closes her eyes and gets up to stare out the window. "Will, *please,* I know you mean well, but I'd really rather not think about this right now."

He blinks at her, then tucks the printout into his bag. "Sorry."

She tries to smile, but it comes out looking broken. "I know. How are your classes going?"

"Well enough. Hard to believe I'll be in school for five more years."

"You'll graduate sooner than that," she predicts. "You have enough experience."

"Thanks to you," he says, once again grateful that she'd allowed him to volunteer at the hospital.

"You're a big help."

He shrugs. "I just talk."

"Sometimes that's all they need, someone to talk to." She looks uncomfortable again, but shakes herself out of it. "Go on home, Will. You have studying to do."

"Yeah," he says, gathering his things. "I'll drop by before class starts."

She glances at his book-bag. "To drop off your profile?"

He shrugs again. "Would you rather I take it to Crawford and have him talk me into going to a crime scene?"

She huffs. "It's fine. I can play the middle-man for now, but you're going to have to speak to him eventually."

"I'll wait until I have a degree and a good reputation to shield me." He smiles as he leaves, trying to convey that he doesn't want her to worry. She will, of course, but he still tries to comfort her.

Done for the day, Will heads home. He doesn't have roommates anymore. His father's life insurance, plus the savings from his business have basically ensured he'll never go hungry as

long as he budgets properly. The house he's renting is small, just one storey, and a little rundown, but it's just a twenty minute drive to his new school, and just over thirty to the hospital. It's also surrounded by one of the only green areas in Baltimore.

He loves the city, but sometimes it's nice to be alone. He can play music as loud as he wants, and doesn't have to worry about his neighbours spying on him. He's even thinking of getting a dog.

It's dark out by the time he gets there, and the temperature is dropping rapidly. He hurries inside and shuts the door behind him, then he hangs his coat up and heads for his bedroom.

His room is a place of peace, with teal walls and a wooden floor. A framed picture of his father, mother, and his three-year-old self sits on the end table next to his bed. They almost look like a real family.

He sets his bag down on his desk and pulls out his laptop, plugging it in to charge.

"Let's see what you've been up to," Will says, studying the printout as his laptop boots up.

The girl in the picture – Fredrica Bimmel – was clearly submerged for a while. Strange, because Bill's two other victims were found out floating on the open water, skinned and displayed for all the world to see just days after they disappeared. The fact that he took to time to weigh her down means *something.*

He drags his fingers along the picture. "You were almost kind to her."

It's true. Compared to his more recent kills, strangulation and post-mortem skinning is nothing. His last victim was beaten to death with a hammer. Whatever Bill's intentions were initially, he's gotten a taste for violence.

Will shakes his head, going over the details again and printing out a few more pictures before he goes to bed.

He doesn't sleep for long before he wakes from a nightmare just after midnight. He's worked hard at building his memory palace, but occasionally, when he dreams, dangerous thoughts still slip into his head. Tonight's featured the image of strips of his own skin falling off, and a faceless man with a hammer hovering over him.

He stumbles to the bathroom in the dark, stripping off his shirt, and grabbing a towel to wipe off his sweaty torso. He gives his back a cursory exam, unable to stop himself from checking that all his skin is still there. He splashes water on his face and contemplates just staying up, but decides against it, knowing he doesn't want to be sleep-deprived today.

To delay a bit longer, he navigates his way to the desk in his room, switches on his lamp, and picks up the notes he made for the Buffalo Bill case.

He knows he shouldn't be looking into it. The nightmares are just the start. Soon he'll start speaking with the voice of a murderer, daydreaming about what he must be feeling when he starts cutting. He knows how bad it is for him, but he can't seem to keep away.

Fredrica Bimmel, his first victim, yet the third one found.

He closes his eyes.

The pendulum swings.

I know her. She's special to me. That's why I weighed her down, so no one would disturb her.

Will opens his eyes again. "So, you knew her? Did she know you? Were you friends?"

He grabs his notebook and flips to a blank page. The pictures are laid out next to it, and as he starts to jot down this new information, he gets a glimpse of their wounds – skin neatly cut and peeled off after death, always in a different place. It's like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

He freezes, pen hovering over paper, and repeats that thought in his head, then he grabs the pictures and holds them up to the window, squinting in the dim moonlight.

I need the extra fabric to make it fit.

"Oh my god," Will whispers, putting the pictures down. He makes his notes quickly, gripping the pen so tightly his hand cramps.

- Building a suit made of skin

- May be physically disfigured or believes himself to be

- Possibly is transgender or believes himself to be transgender (considering he is using female skin)

- Knew Fredrica Bimmel (possibly loved her)

- Check with psychologists specializing in gender identity disorders and screening for transition therapy

- Look for patients who were rejected due to disturbances not associated with gender

- Almost certainly a history of abuse

- Look for people who specialize in tailoring or sewing (making clothes)

He reads over his notes, satisfied for now.

He contemplates calling Jack Crawford immediately, but ultimately decides not to. He'll give his notes to Dr. Bloom in the morning. He doesn't want Crawford to start believing that Will regrets not going into forensics. He loves psychology. He loves helping people at the hospital. It makes him feel like he's doing some good.

After a few more minutes, he slips back into bed, closing his eyes.

He's just starting to drift off when a hand clamps down over his mouth.

His eyes open in shock, adrenaline jolting through him as he sees the glint of a knife in the darkness before it sinks into his stomach lightning fast.

He chokes, arching his back. The pain hasn't reached him yet, but he knows it will soon. He whimpers.

"*Shh,*" a soft voice implores. It's one he'd recognize anywhere. Will's eyes flick to the right, seeing the shadow rising up beside his bed. "*It's alright, Will. Don't move. You're in shock now. I don't want you to feel any pain. In a moment, you'll begin to feel light-headed, then drowsy. Don't resist. It's so gentle, like slipping into a warm bath.*"

He can feel warmth spreading across his torso, dripping down onto the sheets.

That's my blood, he thinks sluggishly. *I'm bleeding. Hannibal stabbed me.* He tastes betrayal on his tongue, and his next thought rises from somewhere in the darkest corner of his mind. *I thought we were friends.*

His hand moves up – so slowly – to touch Hannibal's face. He still can't see anything, vision going blurry and dark around the edges as he lays there dying.

Hannibal sucks in a breath as Will touches him.

"*Remarkable boy. I do admire your courage.*"

Hannibal moves his hand off Will's mouth, and slides his thumb across Will's cheek, catching a tear.

"*I think I'll eat your heart.*"

Will startles awake with a choked-off cry, then grabs at his blankets and pushes them away to reveal his uninjured stomach.

He breathes heavily, checking the clock and realizing he must have fallen asleep again. It's just after 4:00 a.m.

He rubs his face, groaning as he stretches himself out on the bed.

"Damn it." He lays there in silence, trying to settle his racing heart.

He pinches himself just to be sure he's awake this time, feeling like a stupid kid for getting worked up over a nightmare.

He's just about ready to get out of bed when a hand presses against his mouth again.

His eyes spring open.

Hannibal is there, holding a knife just like he dreamt.

The doctor smiles as their eyes meet.

“Hello, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

Evil laughter

End Notes

What a rush! I'd forgotten how good that felt. I hope it was alright. The early chapters might seem a bit disjointed at first. (I originally started out by making point-form notes, then gradually changed it to making entire dialogue exchanges, and then full-fledged paragraphs. I don't recommend it.)

Now, if you need me, I'll just be sitting here for the next hour or so refreshing the page over and over again and probably squealing out loud whenever someone likes or comments.

Oh, and I'm on Tumblr if you're interested, and here's the correct link - https://gweezle.tumblr.com

(Also, your stories are great, thanks for making them)

Adieu, my faithful readers.

Works inspired by this one

Happy Birthday, William by crayuu

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!